

FOR LILIAS





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FOR LILIAS.

A Novel.

BY

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'WOODED AND MARRIED,' 'NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS,'
'NELLIE'S MEMORIES,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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FOR LILIAS.

CHAPTER I.

‘I MUST SIT THERE AND WATCH.’

FOR some minutes Marjory remained like one in a dream. There was a rushing sound in her ears ; a sense of confusion, of unreality in her brain. The pain of her bruises was forgotten ; every sensation seemed swallowed up in the effort of her inner consciousness to comprehend and grasp the meaning of those words.

“ ‘I ain’t your mother ; I am her mother.’ Merciful heavens ! could that be true ? ’ When Marjory came to herself, she found that she was repeating the words aloud over and over again,

as one might reiterate some feverish phrase in delirium, only somehow the meaning escaped her. 'If it should be true,' she said, putting back the heavy hair from her face—and there was no one there to see how white her face had grown—'if this thing should be true!' Then she stopped, and smote the palms of her hands together; then walked to the window, and let the cool sea breeze blow upon her temples, for something seemed to stifle her—she wanted to laugh in her awful joy. She could have laughed loudly and long. "'I ain't your mother; I am her mother.'"

A slight sound overhead, like the tapping of a stick on the floor, roused her. Lilius had been safely carried to her room—the large front room over the drawing-room. Most likely the unusual movements in the house had excited Barry's attention. It was necessary that some one should tell him gently of his sister's accident.

In another moment Marjory had collected her scattered faculties: she washed the dust from her face, smoothed her disordered dress, and then went quickly upstairs.

The boy's eyes were turned eagerly to the door.

'Oh, is that you, Miss Deane?' he said, in a

disappointed tone; 'where is Liliass? There is such a trampling overhead in her room; is there anything the matter?' as he caught sight of her face.

'We came to grief with the pony,' she said, trying to speak lightly. 'He was too fresh, and some one jumping the hedge frightened him. We were both thrown out. I am only a little bruised, but your sister is rather more hurt.'

'She is badly hurt; I can see it in your face; you are keeping something from me!'

'No, no,' she returned soothingly, for the poor lad's expression frightened her. 'I am trying to tell you. She could not walk upstairs, and so they carried her. She is a little stunned; but by this time——' But here she broke off, much distressed, for Barry covered his face with his hands and burst into tears.

'Do not—do not!' she exclaimed, in great emotion; 'oh, please do not cry! I am telling you the truth. Her eyes are closed, and she does not speak at present; but Mr. Gilbert is with her. People are often like that at first after a fall; they are stunned—stupefied. The doctor is with her; everything is being done. You shall

see him if you like—if you will not believe me, I mean.'

'If I could only move—it is my wretched helplessness!' he groaned. 'I suppose some one would carry me to her if she were dying?' cried the lad hysterically. 'To lie here like a log, and wait, wait for what people choose to tell me—oh, it would try a saint! And I am not good; I am not like Lilius.'

'No, you are not good at all,' she said, quite forgetting herself in her efforts to rally him. 'You are making yourself ill, just to worry her when she gets better. That is like the selfishness of you men: you have not the patience to wait a little until things right themselves.'

He was so unused to this bracing treatment—to be scolded instead of petted—that he could only lie and stare at her; but Marjory would not look at him, for fear she should be melted into some show of pity—and he did look so ill, poor fellow!

'I am just waiting until I hear Mr. Gilbert's footsteps on the stairs, and then I will call him in,' she said briskly. 'We will make him tell us all about it, and then you can help us by writing to your mother.'

But, to her surprise, he seemed to shrink from this task.

‘Cannot you write?’ he asked, rather feebly. ‘I would give you the address; and if a telegram be necessary, Mr. Gilbert would tell you what to say. I could not be the one to tell such news to my mother.’

‘I think you are quite wrong,’ returned Margory impatiently. ‘A letter from a stranger would alarm her far more. But, of course, if you do not mind that——’ And then she relented at the sight of his quivering lips. ‘Now, there is no need to worry about that. I am ready to do anything and everything for you or your sister. I see the tea is on the table. You have been waiting all this time; no wonder you are exhausted. But the kettle is boiling, and I will soon have it ready.’

‘But I could not touch it!’ he remonstrated, in a miserable voice. ‘You don’t understand, Miss Deane—how can you?—but when one is in such suspense——’

‘Indeed—indeed I do understand!’ she returned earnestly, laying her hand on his for a moment. ‘Oh, you must not think me so unsympathizing! I am only doing as your

sister would wish. I think we ought to try to please her, even in these little things. It is no good two being ill; it only adds to the trouble. Hush!' interrupting herself. 'I think I hear Mr. Gilbert. Shall I bring him in?'

And as Barry returned a quick reply in the affirmative, she waylaid the doctor and induced him, a little reluctantly, to follow her into the room.

'I have told Mrs. Chard,' he began; and then, at the sight of the invalid, his hasty tones softened a little. 'Oh, this is her brother, I suppose?—and he can give me the address for the telegram. Mrs. Chard seems a little muddled about it, and yet she wants me to communicate with this young lady's mother. Well, perhaps even in a slight accident—as I trust this may prove—the friends should not be left in ignorance.'

'But my sister—how is she?' asked Barry, in a tone of great anxiety.

'Oh, I shall come and see her again by-and-by,' returned Mr. Gilbert evasively; 'and then, perhaps, I shall give a better account of her.'

'But has she—is she conscious yet?' persisted the boy.

Mr. Gilbert gave Marjory a look full of rebuke. He thought her evidently deficient in prudence.

'Well, no—she has not spoken to us yet,' he admitted reluctantly. 'You see,' coming nearer to the couch, 'she fell in a very awkward place, on some sharp flint stones—this young lady was more fortunate, and had a softer bit of road on her side—and so there is slight concussion of the brain. Only slight,' he continued, as Barry started nervously at the word, 'and I have no fears at all as to the result. It is only a question of time. She may lie a few hours, more or less, in her present condition; but, as far as I can judge, she has sustained no other injury, except a slight cut which will soon heal.'

But it was evident that the doctor's words failed to reassure Barry.

'Could it not be managed for me to go up and see her? I am not so very heavy,' pleaded the boy, 'and I am sure Fleming could lift me.'

But Mr. Gilbert shook his head very decidedly over this suggestion.

‘It would not do at all. I have just given orders that my patient is to be kept as quiet as possible. In this sort of case, freedom from noise—perfect silence, is the one thing needful. I have always considered Mrs. Chard a very good nurse, but she is not well herself, and perhaps this deprives her of her usual calmness and good judgment ; but——’

Here the doctor knitted his brows and looked vexed. He had already seriously remonstrated with Mrs. Chard for giving vent to her feelings.

‘Such nonsense, too, making all that fuss, as though the girl belonged to her!’ he had said to himself angrily, as he went downstairs.

‘I was going to suggest,’ returned Marjory boldly, ‘that I should go upstairs presently and see if there be anything that I can do for Miss Carr.’

‘Oh, there is nothing to be done!’ was the quick reply. ‘She has to be watched, of course ; but I wish her to be left perfectly quiet. Do you mean’—with a keen look at Marjory’s face—‘that you would be willing to sit up with her to-night?’ And as the girl nodded assent, he continued, in a pondering tone, ‘Well, it would not be a bad idea. Mrs. Chard is not looking

herself, and she might have one of her attacks in the night, and then who would look after my patient until her mother comes? Yes, we will consider that settled. You can go up in about an hour's time, and tell Mrs. Chard I have sent you to help her.'

'Oh, thank you!' returned Marjory, gratefully; for she feared that she also would be forbidden access to Liliás's room, and she had the strangest longing to be there. 'You will spare me to your sister, will you not?' she continued eagerly, when Mr. Gilbert had left them.

'Oh yes; I shall be thankful to know you are there,' he replied, in a dejected tone. 'Oh, I shall do very well!' as Marjory looked at him rather anxiously. 'Fleming—that is my servant—will come in and attend to me. He is lodging over the way, because Mrs. Chard had no room for him.'

'Is Fleming that respectable-looking man who helped you into your chair the other day?'

'Yes; he is a first-rate nurse. I could not get on without him at all. He ought to wait upon us by rights, only Mrs. Chard is so fussy,

and can't stand having men in her house ; so he only comes in every morning and evening. But I can send for him if I want him.'

'Oh, then I shall be easier in my mind about you,' replied Marjory cheerfully, 'especially if you will be good enough to eat and drink what I set before you. See, I mean to keep you company!' as she carried her cup and plate to her favourite corner.

And as she talked brightly to him, Barry forgot his nervous fears and grew more hopeful ; and before Marjory left him, to prepare for her night-watching, she had persuaded him to send for Fleming and to go quietly to bed.

'Poor fellow ! it is dreadfully sad for him, being so helpless!' she thought, as she went downstairs. 'He will be better when his mother comes. If his sister be long ill, it will be very lonely for him. One imagines things so much worse at a distance.'

But her thoughts changed into a different channel as soon as she was in her own room.

'I am a good actress,' she said to herself, 'whatever Mr. Frere may think to the contrary. I acted well this evening, pretending to scold

that poor boy and to appear so bright and cheerful, when all the time I was afraid that things were bad with her. Oh, what a long day !' she sighed presently, stretching her hands over her head for a moment's relief. ' Was it only this morning that he bade me good-bye, and talked about presentiments ? Will this day ever end, I wonder ? But no ; it is to go stretching on into the night, and through the night I must sit there and watch and think, and never say a word, or ask that question, until we know that she is safe. Oh !'—with a still heavier sigh—' it must be acting still, until the time comes for me to speak.'

Marjory had no idea that she was doing anything specially heroic, when she formed that brave resolution of putting away her own doubts and perplexities until the fitting time arrived for their solution. In her present condition of mind, it was courting martyrdom ; but when perhaps a life might be hanging in the balance, what could she do but stand aside and wait ? Nevertheless, it would have comforted her greatly to know that she was displaying true greatness of mind under trying circumstances.

There was very little light in the sick-room

when she entered it ; a hasty glance towards the bed convinced her that there had been no change in the patient's condition. Liliás still lay in the same unconscious state ; her figure inert and motionless under the light covering ; and her fair hair tucked up hastily, with the exception of one long plait that had loosened, and lay like a gold streak across the pillow. As Marjory stooped over the bed, she thought how beautiful it was. There was nothing painful in Liliás's appearance ; she was always pale, so the faint pallor was scarcely noticeable. In the dim light one might have thought her sleeping, instead of lying with clouded brain in a heavy stupor. It startled Marjory, therefore, not a little, as she leant over her, and softly kissed her cheek, when a faintly uttered 'Mother' most certainly met her ear ; though a moment afterwards Liliás seemed to sink away again into unconsciousness. Marjory was about to speak a tender word in reply, when her arm was violently clutched, and, turning round, she saw Mrs. Chard looking at her with a disturbed, almost frightened expression.

'Come away ; come outside the door a moment,' she whispered hoarsely ; and so harsh

was the grip on her arm, that Marjory thought it better to obey ; and in a moment they were both standing in the passage. 'Why did you kiss her ?' began Mrs. Chard angrily ; but Marjory noticed that she purposely lowered her voice. 'Did not Mr. Gilbert say that no one was to disturb her ; that we were to leave her quiet until she comes to herself ? You ain't got any business up here, Marjory ; and I hope you will just leave Miss Carr to me until her mother comes.'

'On the contrary, I am going to share the night-watch,' returned Marjory, coldly but firmly ; and she repeated Mr. Gilbert's words. Mrs. Chard's countenance fell as she listened ; it was evident that, in spite of her dislike to accept Marjory's services, she would not dare to set aside the doctor's orders.

'There is an attack threatening,' she muttered, as though to herself, 'unless I can stave it off, and cease worrying ;' then louder, 'Well, the responsibility lies on Mr. Gilbert's shoulders, not on mine ; one is enough for any sick-room. I would have kept her quieter, if I could have had my way ; but there, young folks are always wilful,' and with this final thrust she drew aside

rather sullenly, and let Marjory pass before her into the room.

As soon as Marjory had taken the easy-chair by the window, where she could see Liliás and notice the slightest movement, Mrs. Chard slid into her old place close to Liliás's pillow, where the shadow of the curtain would shade her from too close a scrutiny.

A little later on Mr. Gilbert paid his visit. He took no notice of Marjory, but gave his orders in a low voice, standing so that his words should be audible to her. And after he had taken his leave, both the women settled down for their night-watching.

If the day had seemed long to Marjory, the night was simply interminable. One hour dragged on after the other, each one slower than the last.

There was a small fire burning, for the night was chilly, and every now and then Mrs. Chard crept noiselessly from her place to tend it. Marjory watched her movements with close attention. Once when she would have anticipated her, Mrs. Chard waved her impatiently away. She would do everything herself. When once or twice during the night Marjory ventured to

approach the bed, thinking she saw some change on Liliás's face, Mrs. Chard eyed her almost jealously.

It was a miserable ordeal for the tired girl, but she fought gallantly with her weariness. Her eyes had grown accustomed to the dim light, and Mrs. Chard's face was clearly visible to her, in spite of the sheltering curtain. Once or twice it grew so wan and grey that Marjory started up, thinking that she was ill; but the warning hand only waved her away. 'It is nothing—I'm used to it,' she said harshly; 'the drops will give me relief by-and-by. Your sitting there watching only makes me worse. No; leave the fire alone. I will put on a bit of coal with my fingers.' But Marjory noticed that she tottered as she walked, as though from weakness. Once, towards morning, Marjory dozed; indeed, though she would not have owned it, she slept for some time. The moment she roused, her eyes turned instinctively to the bed; and then she closed them again, and remained apparently sleeping.

That moment had shown her Mrs. Chard's empty chair. The woman was half kneeling, half lying across the bed, with her face hidden

in the pillow, and the braid of golden hair was in her hand. 'Oh, my darling!' Marjory could hear her whisper; 'my darling whom I have given up! But it is better so—far, far happier for her, though not for me.'

A sensation of coldness, almost of sickness, passed over Marjory; but she remained still. A moment after there was a slight movement, and she could not refrain from opening her eyes. Mrs. Chard was standing by the bed with the tears running down her cheeks. As Marjory stirred, she came towards her, drying them with her hands.

'I have got a bit nervous and low with want of sleep,' she said, with an attempt at her old manner. 'You have had a fine nap yourself, Marjory—more than an hour—but you look palish. I will make a cup of tea for us both; it will put a little heart in us.'

Marjory made no answer; but as Mrs. Chard turned to the fireplace, she moved herself with some difficulty, for she was stiff from her bruises, and walked towards the bed. Lilius was still lying in the same position, but it struck her her face was a little less pale, and her attitude less rigid. As she stooped over her

to fold back the loose braid, it felt damp to her hand, and the pillow and even the coverlid were moistened as though with tears. What agony, what repentance, what wrong-doing had set those tears flowing? Were they tears of guilt or sorrow? Marjory felt something like pity stirring her heart as she went softly back to her place. Mrs. Chard had not noticed her movements. She brought her the tea presently, looking red-eyed and subdued, but more like her old self. The storm of feeling had evidently spent itself. She even commented on the grey dawn that seemed creeping over the sea. 'It will soon be morning, and then you can go down and have a rest,' she said quite pleasantly; 'for it is easy to see that you are as tired as tired can be, Marjory.'





CHAPTER II.

LILIAS'S MOTHER.

IT was still early, and the world was only half-awake, when Marjory crept downstairs and cautiously unbarred the front door, and stood in the porch to breathe the sweet freshness of the spring morning.

There was no human life stirring. The Crown Hotel presented a blank of closed and curtained windows. The beach was empty: only the brown fishing-smacks and coils of ropes lay high and dry upon the shingle. The tide was coming in, with a low wash and ripple of sound. A soft wind seemed to blow straight from the sea over Marjory's tired face, lifting the stray hair from her temples. The beauty and stillness of the scene stole into the girl's

senses with a subtle feeling of rest after conflict. Nothing moving on God's earth, so she thought, except some white fantail pigeons that were strutting under the bows of a large boat. A dim golden haze lay on the sea, and above it stretched the blue morning sky, with its benignant promise of a day's sunshine.

'It reminds me of a picture I have seen of the morning after a shipwreck on a Cornish beach,' thought Marjory; 'only there are no broken spars and dismantled masts strewn on the shingle. It is an odd fancy, perhaps, but I feel wrecked somehow, as though I had gone to pieces on some concealed rock. I suppose I am the same as I was yesterday, but I feel different. Well, it is a comfort to know that there are two real people in the world, anyhow;' and then she sighed as she thought of the miles that separated her from her friends.

A sign of life in an opposite window arrested Marjory's attention. It was evident that some one besides herself was awake; but she was not a little astonished when, a few minutes afterwards, a tall figure in black appeared at the side door of the Crown, and in another moment was crossing the road with rapid, uneven foot-

steps, that sent the pigeons fluttering to the roofs. Marjory watched her curiously. The lady had evidently dressed herself hastily, for she wore a loose cloak just folded round her, and a lace veil over her head. A sudden light broke on Marjory, and she moved impatiently to meet her.

‘I am so glad you have come!’ she said quickly. ‘You are Mrs. Carr, are you not?’

‘Yes, yes!’ she returned, and Marjory noticed how nervously her hands grasped the palings as she looked up in the girl’s face. ‘But Liliash—my child, how is she?’

‘She is about the same,’ replied Marjory, in a soothing voice; ‘but I thought just now that she looked a little less pale. Please come in here a moment’—opening the door of the parlour—‘and I will tell Mrs. Chard that you have come. The doctor has ordered such perfect quiet, that we have to be very careful, and there must be no talking in the room.’

‘Yes, I know; concussion of the brain—that was what he said. Oh, you have no need to tell a mother to be careful!’ and here a faint smile came to her pale lips in spite of her troubled looks.

Marjory thought she had never seen such a beautiful face. The brown, plaintive eyes reminded her of Barry.

‘I arrived last night,’ she continued in a low, musical voice, that somehow thrilled to Marjory’s ears. ‘It was so late, and I could not make you hear, and I dared not knock loudly for fear of disturbing my son. Oh, it has been such a night! I have been sitting watching the light in her window, and praying—praying and longing for day; and then I saw the door open and you standing there, and I guessed how it was—that you had been watching too. And now, please take me to her. You need not be afraid of her mother. Oh, we know how to be quiet and how to efface ourselves, if it be for our child’s good!’

‘Come, then,’ replied Marjory; but she spoke almost inaudibly as she led the way upstairs.

A sudden return of yesterday’s dizziness seemed to send her senses reeling. She stopped on the first landing to recover herself, and Mrs. Carr stopped too.

‘Will you wait one instant?’ she said gently. ‘This is my son’s room, is it not?—and he will be awake listening, and worrying if I do not go

to him. Yes, Barry, it is I,' as the boy's voice called to them both. 'Why are you lying awake, dearest? Has your night been troubled too?'

And Marjory, supporting herself giddily against the wall, could hear Barry's low, vehement answer:

'Oh, mother, mother, I am so glad you have come! It has been so dreadful without you!'

'Yes, I know,' kissing him; 'but you will try and help me, my boy, will you not? You will not fret and make yourself ill? Now I am going to Liliass. I will come to you again by-and-by—as soon as I can.'

'Let it be very soon, mother,' Marjory heard, as Mrs. Carr softly closed the door.

'He looks ill,' she sighed. 'All this is bad for him. My poor boy, how much he has to bear!'

Mrs. Chard was just coming out of the room, with the little tea-tray in her hand, when she caught sight of them. A sudden rattle of the tea-cups made Marjory instinctively take the tray out of the shaking fingers. Mrs. Carr drew back rather frightened.

‘Miriam, my good creature, have I startled you? Good heavens, if I had caused you to drop the tray! This young lady was right. I ought to have allowed her to prepare you.’

‘It was foolish of me to give such a start,’ returned the woman, in a scared voice; ‘but I was not looking for you for hours yet, and you came upon me sudden-like. Why, it might have been her death!’ laying her trembling hand on Mrs. Carr’s arm. ‘I fancied there was a turn for the better, but a noise like that might have killed her. I should have been as good as her murderer, shouldn’t I, Mrs. Carr?’

‘Hush, Miriam! what nonsense! when this dear young lady,’ with a grateful glance at Marjory, ‘has just saved us by her promptness. Now, not a word more. I want to go in and see my child;’ and she turned away with gentle dignity, and entered the room, followed by Mrs. Chard.

Marjory crept in behind them; perhaps she had no business there, but she had yielded her night’s rest for the sake of this young stranger, and she felt as though this had given her some claim on Liliass’s mother.

Mrs. Carr did not seem to notice her presence;

she stood by the bed, looking down on her unconscious daughter, with eyes so full of love and sorrow that a great lump seemed to rise in Marjory's throat.

'Oh, my darling, my darling! will she ever open her sweet eyes and look at me again?' whispered the poor mother, in a voice of suppressed agony; and, as though in answer, the limbs moved slightly, and there was a faint flicker of the eyelids.

'Mother—my own mother!' came drowsily and indistinctly from the scarcely parted lips. A lightning-like flash of joy swept over Mrs. Carr's face.

'She knows me; it is only partial unconsciousness; she is coming to herself!' She sighed out the words as though overcome by the very fulness of happiness. 'Lilias, my child, it will all be well now; your mother will not leave you.' She checked herself as though her words were incautious, and kissed her hair softly, and put it back from her face; and, at the touch of her warm, firm hand, there was a faint smile on Lilias's face.

'Mother,' she said again, but this time less incoherently.

'Marjory, I feel ill; I must have air,' was muttered hoarsely in her ear, and Marjory felt a heavy touch on her arm. Mrs. Carr did not turn her head as Marjory guided Mrs. Chard's uncertain footsteps to the door; she was still bending over her child with fond worshipping looks.

'Oh to be loved like that,' thought the girl; 'to be loved in that way by one's mother!' But she tried to banish the envious feelings as she placed Mrs. Chard carefully, though not tenderly, on her own bed, and arranged the pillows and covered up her feet, and measured out the drops as she told her; and then ran down to wake Martha, who was a drowsy body, and to bring a few sticks to light the fire: for, in spite of the spring sunshine that was flooding the little room, Mrs. Chard's teeth were chattering as though with the ague. Was this the attack that she had been trying to ward off all night? Anyhow, she looked a pitiable object, cowering and shivering, and yet demanding air.

'I am like ice, and yet I can't breathe for want of air,' she gasped; and Marjory, obeying her own instincts—for she knew little about nursing—set open the window and door, and warmed some flannels for her feet while the

water was heating, and then stood and fanned her patiently until the paroxysm of pain had passed.

‘Thank you, Marjory—thank you, dearie,’ she said faintly, after a time; ‘you have done a deal for me, and I am easier now; those drops always give me relief after a while. Supposing I turn round and try to have a sleep, while you go down and have your breakfast, and bid Martha do the best she can for Mr. Barry and his mother. Oh dear, oh dear!’ fretfully, ‘how ever will Martha manage without me scolding behind her?’

‘I think you had better lie still and not trouble about anything,’ replied Marjory quietly. ‘I will look after Martha, and do what I can for Mr. Barry. When Mr. Gilbert comes I will send him to you.’ For Marjory felt vaguely alarmed at Mrs. Chard’s appearance; the blueness of her face and the darkness of her lips seemed bad signs, even to her inexperience.

‘You are a good girl, Marjory,’ responded the other, turning her head away; but Marjory did not hear more, for she was anxious to set about her self-imposed duties.

Martha’s blunders and stupidity soon cooled

her enthusiasm, and she was looking at the blackened fire in the kitchen with feelings of despair, and wondering how the bacon was to be toasted and the eggs boiled, when she was relieved by the entrance of Fleming.

‘I hear that my mistress has arrived,’ he said, ‘and that Mrs. Chard is ill. Is there anything that I can do?’ eying her doubtfully, and hardly knowing what to make of this stylish young lady in the brown dress, whom he had just heard from Martha was Mrs. Chard’s daughter.

‘Anything that you can do?’ repeated Marjory, brightening up at this. ‘Oh, thank you, Fleming; I should be so much obliged if you would help me get some breakfast for your master and Mrs. Carr—but just look at that fire.’

‘If you will leave it to me and Martha, ma’am,’ he returned respectfully, ‘I will soon have it all ready. I can take a hand at cooking, for I am an old soldier; and as to that fire, we will soon settle that.’

And as Marjory gave up her place to him and thankfully withdrew, she could hear him ordering Martha about in brief soldierly style.

She was dusting the drawing-room, which Martha

had neglected, and making it trim and habitable for its occupant, when Fleming entered with the neat little breakfast-tray.

‘I am afraid I must trouble you to take this up to my mistress, ma’am,’ he said apologetically; ‘for I dare not trust Martha up these stairs. When you come down you will find yours ready for you. And then I will attend to my young master; but he sent me away just now, because he was sure you needed help.’

This little piece of thoughtfulness quite touched Marjory.

‘Thank you, Fleming, for managing so nicely for me,’ she said pleasantly, as she took the tray.

Mrs. Carr was sitting by the bed as she entered, holding her daughter’s hand. She looked up with a grateful smile into the girl’s face, as she brought a little table to her side and arranged things comfortably for her. ‘How good you are to me!’ she whispered.

Marjory shook her head at this.

‘I am going downstairs now,’ she said, in a low voice; ‘but I shall be back presently to make the room tidy. Mrs. Chard is not very well, and Martha is so clumsy that we dare not let her come in.’

‘Miriam is not well!’ ejaculated Mrs. Carr. ‘I thought she looked strangely ill just now. Liliass has moved,’ she continued. ‘She was feeling for my hand just now. When the doctor comes, he will be sure to say she is better.’

‘I am sure of that too,’ returned Marjory, in a voice full of feeling. And then she withdrew, feeling that things already looked brighter.

Marjory found she had enough on her hands that day. When Mr. Gilbert came, he pronounced a very favourable opinion on his patient. The brain was gradually recovering power; but the greatest care and the most absolute quiet was still necessary. Very little must be said to her. There would doubtless be a few days of feverish restlessness, but after that he hoped she would be fully herself again. His opinion on Mrs. Chard struck Marjory as slightly evasive.

‘It was one of her usual attacks,’ he said. ‘Of course, she had been worrying herself about something. He had warned her over and over again, that she must keep her mind quiet, and take care of herself; but she would not take his advice. She must just lie where she was for the remainder of the day—indeed, for the next two or three days she would not be fit for work.’

And when he had delivered himself of these remarks, he went down to Barry, to carry him a cheering report of his sister's health.

‘Don’t mind me, Marjory; you will have enough to do, goodness knows, without my giving you extra trouble,’ observed Mrs. Chard dejectedly.

And Marjory soon found that she spoke the truth. But for Fleming’s skilful help, she would have been in utter despair.

Martha, who was greatly in awe of him, obeyed his orders most implicitly. Thanks to his supervision, the meals were served tolerably well cooked, and Marjory found herself at liberty to go in and out of the two sick-rooms, which were happily adjoining each other, and to perform all the sundry little offices that were needed for the comfort of the invalids.

A sense of duty made Marjory hide the repugnance that she felt in ministering to Mrs. Chard: She entered the room unwillingly, and left it as soon as possible. Mrs. Chard’s gratitude was coldly received: her one longing was to be with Liliás and her mother.

The chief difficulty lay with Barry. The strain of the long night had told upon him, and

a certain reaction had set in : he became more depressed as the day went on, and Marjory found it almost impossible to leave him. When her services were not required upstairs, she sat and talked, and even read to him. It was not until the evening was half over, and Fleming came to relieve her, that she found herself at liberty to sit quietly for a few minutes in Liliás's room. A sort of magnetism drew her there, and, but for her overpowering weariness, she could have lingered there for hours, just watching that quiet figure sitting so tranquilly by the bed.

'I have never seen anyone like her,' thought Marjory. 'I fancied it was only Liliás's partiality, but she did not say a word too much. How Mr. Frere would rave about her if he could see her !—he does so admire handsome women. Handsome is not the word : she is simply beautiful.'

And then, as she leant back among the cushions and perused the face of Liliás's mother in the dim softened light, she went on in the same critical vein :

'She is very large and massive. I suppose most people would call her a fine woman. But how gracefully she moves ! Her features are so clearly cut, like the features in a cameo ; and I

do so admire that creamy complexion ; and her hair is as brown as mine—like a Spanish chestnut—not a grey hair to be seen. I wonder Liliás is not more like her ; but Mr. Barry has her eyes.'

As though conscious of Marjory's scrutiny, Mrs. Carr looked up and smiled ; and a moment afterwards she crossed the room to the girl's side.

'I was just thinking how tired you looked,' she said, putting a large but beautifully-shaped hand on Marjory's shoulder. 'Young people cannot afford to lose a night's rest : it is only we elder folk, who have served our apprenticeship in a sick-room.'

'But you had no sleep either,' replied Marjory hastily. 'It is dreadful to think of your sitting up to-night, too !'

'Dreadful to sit by my child's side?' returned Mrs. Carr, with gentle reproach. 'Do you know how happy I shall be ? Yesterday—oh, it was martyrdom ! But to-night it will be so different ! She is sleeping now, poor darling ; but when she wakes, how pleased she will be to see me beside her !'

'I will bid you good-night, then,' replied Marjory, a little abruptly.

That odd choking was in her throat again. Was she growing envious of this girl, who had been saved from death, because of this tender love that seemed enfolding her?

‘Yes, you shall go,’ returned Mrs. Carr, a little surprised by her manner, and still more by the moody look in the girl’s eyes; ‘but I must thank you first for being so good to my children. I know all you have done for Barry to-day, and how kindly you have waited on us all;’ and as Marjory made no response, she stooped down and kissed her cheek. ‘Go and sleep, my dear;’ and Marjory felt herself gently dismissed.

‘She wants Liliias all to herself; the presence of a stranger is irksome to her,’ she said to herself rather bitterly, as she went into Mrs. Chard’s room to make her comfortable for the night; and when this was done she went downstairs, still in the same strange dissatisfied mood.

‘I wonder what is the matter with me,’ she said to herself, as she laid her head on the pillow. ‘It is because I am so tired, I suppose, and that shaking was not good for me.’ But it was not her stiffness or fatigue that made the

tears run down her cheeks. ‘Have I no mother at all,’ she sighed—‘no one living to love me as Liliās is loved?’ But even as the thought passed through her mind, Anne was on her knees praying for her adopted child, praying as only such women can pray; pure unselfish petitions for the beloved one whom they would fain shield from all the evils of life.





CHAPTER III.

‘WHO AM I?’

NEARLY a week had passed since Mrs. Carr’s arrival at Whitecliffe, when Marjory was sitting late one evening by the window of her little parlour, looking out idly into the summer’s dusk that seemed creeping over the grey sea. An open letter lay in her lap, a merry rambling epistle from Mr. Frere that had just reached her; such a letter as he loved to write to Marjory, and such as she loved to receive from him. But, for the first time, it had failed to bring a smile to her lips; on the contrary, a deeper cloud gathered on her brow.

‘I have not told him or Anne,’ she said to herself; ‘no wonder Anne found my last note brief and unsatisfactory, and wonders what I am

doing with myself; not a word has reached them about the accident, or Liliás's illness. I have put it off, waiting for a leisure hour, and that hour never comes.' Marjory might well excuse herself on the score of want of leisure, for this was the first idle moment she had had in all these days.

Mrs. Chard had only rallied very slowly from her attack, and was still unable to leave her room, and the whole care and supervision of the household had come upon Marjory.

Barry would have been lost without her; the poor lad must have been thrown sadly on his own resources, but for her bright companionship. She talked to him, read to him, and listened patiently to his half-boyish, half-philosophical disquisitions; and the one half-hour that she allowed herself for exercise was passed beside his chair. Liliás was recovering gradually from day to day, and needed little beside her mother's care. Marjory knew the greatest comfort that she could vouchsafe both to her and Mrs. Carr, was to relieve them from all anxiety about Barry; and their gratitude amply rewarded her.

Her brief visits to the sick-room were always hailed joyfully by both mother and daughter.

Lilias would draw her face down to her pillow and stroke it affectionately.

‘Mother says she cannot help loving you for your own sake as well as mine,’ she whispered one day, when Mrs. Carr had left the room for a moment. ‘She says that you are so good to Barry, and such a dear girl. She wants you to come to St. Kilda’s as much as I do, Marjory;’ for the ‘Miss Deane’ had been tacitly dropped between them.

Marjory blushed at the praise. She was glad to know that Mrs. Carr regarded her with such favour. She had almost a morbid craving that Lilias’s mother should think well of her. Marjory cared for few people, but she clung to the few whom her heart elected to love with almost passionate fidelity; and from the first moment Mrs. Carr’s fascinations had subjugated her, and every day her admiration deepened. She was so affectionate, so unconscious, so utterly merged in her children, her own rare gifts of mind and person seemed hidden from her eyes. She smiled at Lilias’s open adoration; the girl’s lover-like devotion was received with deprecating gentleness.

‘You must not believe all Lilias says,’ she

would observe almost anxiously to Marjory, when Liliass would break into one of her little rhapsodies. 'We all think the face we love beautiful. I like my children to think there is no one like their mother. Of course, we must expect people to laugh at us—not that that matters much.'

'No, indeed !' returned Marjory vehemently ; but she sighed as she went out of the room. 'If I lived with her I should be as silly as Liliass,' she thought. 'She has no idea how she strikes people. It is not exactly her beauty ; it is her voice and everything about her. I am determined that Anne and Mr. Frere shall see her.'

It would have soothed her much if she had known how warmly Mrs. Carr returned her admiration. She praised her to her daughter in no measured terms.

'I know she lives with gentle-people, and has been well educated,' she said once ; 'but how can Miriam's daughter be such a distinguished-looking creature ? She is handsome—very handsome, I think, only she has not a happy expression ; but it is her aristocratic air and refined voice that surprises me, and her hands and

feet are beautiful. One would not expect to find that. Robert Deane was such a common good-looking fellow, a clumsy young blacksmith—nothing more.'

'Her hands are far prettier than mine,' returned Liliás, with a charming pout—not that she the least minded that fact.

'You are perfect in my eyes, darling,' replied her mother, kissing her; and, indeed, she would not have owned there was a single flaw in Liliás.

'Mother really thinks me lovely,' observed Liliás once, with a merry laugh; and she heartily enjoyed the little joke.

Marjory was sitting idle in her little parlour, because all her duties were over for the day, and she really wanted a quiet half-hour to herself. She was forming a painful resolution, and one that would be difficult to carry out, and from which her whole nature shrank. Nevertheless, she knew it must be done.

To-morrow Mrs. Chard would be downstairs, and would doubtless set about her old duties. There was some talk, too, that Liliás should be moved into the drawing-room. At any moment Mr. Frere might take it into his head to come over to Whitecliffe. Marjory felt that what she

had to do must be done at once, and that no false pity, no cowardice on her own part, should prevent her to-night from putting the long-deferred question to Mrs. Chard.

‘I have waited a whole week until I thought she was well enough to bear it, but now I am determined not to sleep another night until she has explained those words.’

And Marjory’s mouth took its decided curve, as she rose from her seat and went slowly upstairs.

Mrs. Chard was sitting by the fire in her grey wrapper. It was a small room, and shabbily furnished, but in the firelight it looked bright and cosy. The closed curtains shut out the dull view; the little table, with its lamp, medicine-bottles, and a large Bible, was close beside her. She had evidently been reading, for a crimson marker lay on the open page.

She looked up at Marjory almost affectionately.

‘I was wondering what you were doing with yourself, dearie,’ she said. ‘I knew Mr. Barry had gone to bed, and I thought you might be dull all alone, as you were not in the next room.’

‘No; they do not want me. I have come to sit with you a little,’ replied Marjory, placing herself on the opposite side of the fireplace. ‘You do not think of going to bed yet, I suppose?’

‘Not just yet, dearie. I have only just taken my supper. I must not lie down for a good hour to come.’

‘The room is very close,’ observed Marjory, feeling feverish at the thought of her self-imposed task.

‘Open the door, then. I should like a little more air myself. The night is warm, surely.’

Marjory half rose, and then she sat down again.

‘No, better not,’ she returned hurriedly. ‘Mrs. Carr might hear us. I forgot she and Liliás were so near. One should not tell secrets with an open door,’ continued the girl boldly; and she shot a swift look at Mrs. Chard from under her long lashes.

Mrs. Chard fluttered the leaves of the Bible nervously.

‘I was reading when you came in,’ she said, ‘about the prodigal son. I mostly turn to that

when I am a bit low in my mind. I don't know what you mean about secrets. I suppose you have not got any worth mentioning, Marjory ?'

'No, Mrs. Chard ; the secret is none of mine,' she returned very slowly ; but there was no mistaking her impressive manner.

Mrs. Chard shrank back into her chair.

'Why are you calling me by my name ? I ain't Mrs. Chard to you !' looking at Marjory with her old frightened expression.

'What are you to me ?' asked Marjory, leaning forward and speaking almost in a whisper. 'I have called you mother, but I will never do that again as long as I live. I am no child of yours ; but am I anything to you ? That is what I want to know. Who is Liliias, and who am I, and what are you to both of us ? That is what I mean to find out to-night : ' and then, in a clear, accusing voice, she repeated, syllable by syllable, as though the words had been burned into her brain :

' " I ain't your mother ; I am her mother. Let me go—let me go, Marjory, to my own child ! " Your own words, Mrs. Chard—your very words, as I can witness in a court of law.'

Mrs. Chard uttered a faint cry, and covered her face with her hands; but a moment afterwards she looked up with a sort of ghastly eagerness.

'I was not in my right mind. I had been asleep, and you startled me. You frightened me about the blood; you know you did, Marjory. You have no call to repeat a few bits of words that showed I was dazed.'

Marjory's eyes flashed with sudden passion.

'You can say that!' she said, pointing her finger with youthful severity at the unhappy woman before her. 'You can say what you know to be false with your hand resting on the Bible—you that might have been dead a few days ago, and who know what is said to us there about liars! Oh!' with another scathing glance, that seemed to wither her victim, 'I will not talk to you! I will have no mercy upon you! I will write to Mr. Frere to come to me, and he shall take me to a magistrate, and I will swear to the words you spoke that day, and how you have lied to me about your lodgers, and——'

But here Mrs. Chard caught hold of her dress with a suppressed groan.

'You are killing me, Marjory! Don't! Where's my drops? Give me them first, and I will make a clean breast. The drops! the drops!—and I must think first!'

Marjory, frightened at the livid look on Mrs. Chard's face, choked back the angry feelings that threatened to deprive her of all self-mastery, and measured out the medicine with a shaking hand.

'It is you who excite yourself,' she said harshly. 'Why will you not do the right thing? There is nothing else that will give you peace. There, I will wait while you recover yourself, but you must not try my patience too far;' and so saying, she walked up and down the narrow room with the restless movements of a caged animal. Yes, she was hard—hard, perhaps, on a dying woman; but her own suspense, her impatience, her despair at these feeble subterfuges, were driving her wild. 'If she would but tell the truth—tell it for once in her life—I feel I could forgive her, whatever it is; but not now, for these last few days I have almost hated her;' but here Mrs. Chard's weak voice recalled her.

'Sit down, Marjory; why are you pacing up and down so that they will hear you? Come a bit

nearer. I won't speak above my breath; the walls may have ears, for aught I know. Now, before I tell the story that maybe I have got to tell you, you must make me a faithful promise—a promise that shall be as sacred and binding as this,' touching the book beside her.

'What am I to promise, Mrs. Chard?'

'That you will not repeat to a living soul what I tell you to-night until after my death. That shall set you free to say what you will.'

Marjory experienced a little shock of dismay at these words. The idea of hiding anything from Anne and Mr. Frere was repugnant to her in the highest degree. 'Oh, I cannot do that,' she replied quickly.

'Then not one word will you drag from me to-night, or any night,' returned Mrs. Chard, in a tone of dogged obstinacy. 'Oh, you may do your worst; you may bring them all about me, but I warn you there is nothing that can be proved. All my old neighbours at Chigwell know I had an attack of the brain after you were lost; and if I am a bit wrong in my head, and excited at times, no one will wonder at it.'

Marjory sat absolutely dumb. The cunning of this speech baffled her completely. She could

have wrung her hands in despair at her futile attempts to track this woman's secret. Mrs. Chard saw her advantage, and followed it up.

'It is not much to promise, Marjory; you need not be so scared about it. My days are numbered, and I do not believe I have many months to live. Ask Mr. Gilbert, if you doubt my word; you are always doubting me, but to-night I am telling you Gospel truth. It was only yesterday that I brought him to book myself, and he as good as owned that I might go off in one of these attacks.'

'I believe you are telling the truth in this matter,' returned Marjory slowly, for she had herself spoken to Mr. Gilbert, and he had admitted bluntly that he did not believe that Mrs. Chard would last a twelvemonth. 'There is more the matter with her than people suppose,' he had said frankly. 'It is not only the heart, but some of the other organs are diseased. She has not been a strong woman, and she has had a great deal of trouble. Try and get her to unburthen herself, for I have long thought there is something on her mind.' And Marjory had promised that she would do her best.

'I ain't likely to tell lies on that subject,'

replied Mrs. Chard bitterly; 'and if you would be a bit kinder to me, and just give me your promise to leave things as they are until I am gone, I will not deny that it will be a sort of relief to tell it to some one. I have had a miserable life, Marjory, and I don't care how soon I part with it. I am like that poor prodigal—I have been feeding on husks until I am pretty near starved.'

'You are tempting me to do wrong; I know it—I feel it,' returned Marjory excitedly. 'But the temptation is too hard for me; I cannot endure this suspense.' She clasped her hands, and the words 'Deliver us from evil' passed through her mind, but she closed her heart to the thought. 'Yes, I will promise—there is my hand on it. I am true; I never told anyone a lie in my life.'

'Oh, I can trust you, Marjory, though you are none of mine. I will always say you are as true as steel, and would go through a martyrdom rather than break your word. Well, you have promised, and you shall hear what you are longing to know—that you are only my foster-child, and not my daughter; it is Liliás who is my real child.'

'Liliás! really Liliás? Good heavens, if she

only knew that !' then, knitting her brows perplexedly, 'But who am I? What is my name? Is my mother dead?' for, strange to say, no suspicion of the actual truth had penetrated her brain.

'Your mother is in there,' pointing to the wall. 'Your name is Liliias Marjory Carr, and Mr. Barry is your own brother.' But here she stopped, for this time it was Marjory who gave vent to a sound like a hoarse, hysteric scream, only her face was happily muffled in her hands. In another moment she had sprung to the window, and, throwing it open, leant out into the night. Faint starlight overhead, and the slow washing of the sea in her ears; her brain seemed reeling; a cold moisture bedewed her forehead.

'“Your mother is in there.” Mrs. Carr—that beautiful woman—so gentle, so beloved—her mother!' It was well that the words evoked their own pathos; well that a sudden relief of tears eased the over-charged brain. Mrs. Chard shivered and grew pale as the night-draught and the sound of Marjory's sobs reached her; but to Marjory those floods of tears brought their own healing.

Mrs. Chard watched her anxiously.

'You are better now, Marjory, aren't you?'

she asked almost piteously, as her little lamp flared in the draught.

Marjory did not answer, but she presently closed the window and sat down. There was not a vestige of colour in her face, and her eyes were full of tears.

‘Go on ; I can listen now,’ she said, covering her eyes with her hand. ‘I must hear, and understand, or how am I to believe ? Tell me about it from the beginning.’

‘There is no call to go over it all again,’ returned Mrs. Chard hurriedly. ‘Mr. Frere knows how mother and I lived up at the Grange at St. Kilda’s—the place they call Mavisbank now ; and how my young mistress, Miss Weston, married before I took up with Robert Deane ; and how things went wrong with the handsome young gentleman, her husband, and she was forced to go to Peru with him, and leave her baby with me.’

‘One moment,’ exclaimed Marjory, rousing up at this ; ‘there is some discrepancy here. When you lived at the cottage at Chigwell, there were two children—one of them your own——’ she paused, and Mrs. Chard nodded ; ‘but the other—oh, I remember ; you told

Mr. Frere and Anne some story about the mother being in a lunatic asylum.'

'One sin leads to another,' responded Mrs. Chard, in a conscience-stricken voice. 'As a girl, I always spoke the truth; but no sooner was the first wrong step taken than I found myself in a muddle, and nothing but falsehoods would help me out. I remember now that I did make up a sort of story about Captain Cooper and his mad wife; but there was Mr. Frere ferreting things out with his sharp questions, and I got in a panic and said what came into my head. I did not want to set him on the Carrs' track, for I knew they might be coming back to England and bringing Lilius with them, and there might be some awkward inquiries. I was not wholly true, and I was not wholly false; I just jumbled things a little, that was all.'

'You say Mrs. Carr,' pronouncing the name with trembling lips, 'left her baby with you. I was that baby, I suppose?'

Mrs. Chard nodded again.

'Yes, I was nursing you then, for my poor young mistress had been very ill with fretting about her husband's losses, and fearing he might

go away and leave her, and she was so much in love with him that she was breaking her heart about it.'

'Wait a moment!' panted Marjory, and the blood surged into her face suddenly and vividly. 'Tell me what my father was like. I have never heard of him—not a word—not a word!'

'Well, he was not unlike Robert. If Robert had been dressed up in gentleman's clothes, and had trimmed himself a little, they might have passed for brothers; only Robert was florid, and Philip Carr was pale. He was a fine handsome man, only a little too delicate for my fancy; and he had very fair hair and moustache, and his nose was a little long. Robert's was, too. Their eyes were both hazel-brown. I remember Miss Liliash—she was Miss Liliash then—talking about her lover to me. She was even then crazy about him, though nothing to what she was afterwards. "He is so uncommon-looking, Miriam," she said to me one day. "One generally sees blue or grey eyes with such fair hair; the combination of dark eyes is more rarely seen." And after she was married, and there was expectation of your coming into the world, she said that she was sure that it would

be a girl, and that she hoped it would be like Philip, and not like her ; and yet she was the most beautiful young lady that one could set eyes on.'

'She is beautiful still,' murmured Marjory.

'Yes; but you have got a look of her. Perhaps Mr. Barry is the most like ; but you have her low forehead, and the hair and eyes are the same colouring, though your skin is darker ; and there is a trick of expression now and then, and a tone in your voice that turns me cold with fear. But what was I saying ? I have lost the thread of my story.'

'That you were nursing me, because mother was ill.'

'Ah, true. It is a little difficult for me to tell things off straight—indeed she was ill. You were scarcely with her at all ; and when the doctors said the voyage would do her good, and that she would fret herself to death if Mr. Philip left her behind, it was arranged that you were to be given into my charge ; and mother, who was alive then, was to come with me to Chigwell and mind Marjory. Marjory Liliass I had called her, out of love for my dear young mistress. And as nothing better could be arranged—for you would have pined without me, being a delicate baby—

the poor thing was forced to go her way over the seas without you. They had hoped to be back in a few months, but they were away nigh upon three years.'

'And all that time Liliias and I were together?'

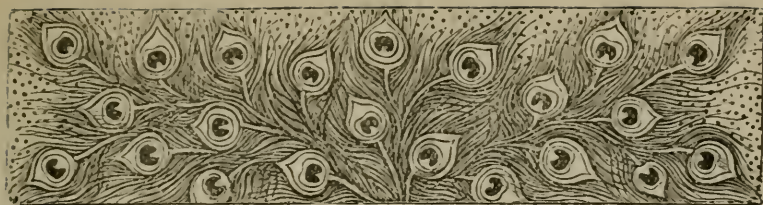
'Yes—you and Sissie. We called her Sissie because that was your name for her; but she always called herself Lila, or Lily. Well, in spite of mother's death and Robert's leaving me, I was not half as unhappy as I ought to have been, though I had bad times, of course; but I was that fond of you, Marjory, that no one, not knowing us, could have guessed which was my own child. You were a bit passionate and masterful even then; but I was as proud of you as proud could be, because you had grown so strong and bonnie-looking, and loved your mammie, as you called me, and was so good to Sissie. I used to stand and watch you both at nights, with your little arms round each other so loving. You were always for giving up things for Sissie, sharing your toys with her. I never knew you snatch a thing from her—never. "Give Sissie the biggest lot, mammie," was always your cry.

'Well, it was all as peaceful as possible until

that dreadful day when the pedlar-woman came to the door, and soon after we found you were missing. I had had a letter that very morning from my young mistress, saying they were on their way home to fetch their little Marjory—she and Philip Carr and their baby-boy. “He is such a fine strong fellow,” she wrote—“my very image, they say; but to my thinking, he is far too beautiful. You are a tiresome creature, Miriam, never to tell me what my darling Marjory is like. Just ‘bonnie-looking’ is no description to a mother.”

‘Well, I had that letter in my pocket; and when they told me you were as good as stolen, and I raced up and down the village like a mad-woman, it came over me that I would rather have lost Lilies, dearly as I loved her. The thought that my sweet young mistress had trusted her child into my keeping, and that I could give no account of her, drove me nearly wild—— Wait an instant, dearie; for if you will believe me, the thought of that miserable day overpowers me even now.’

And Mrs. Chard leant back in her chair and fanned herself feebly, as though her strength were gone.



CHAPTER IV.

‘YES, HAZEL—JUST LIKE PHILIP’S.’

MARJORY was in no hurry for Mrs. Chard to resume the thread of her narrative. As far as her dazed condition would allow, she was endeavouring to compare Mrs. Chard’s story with her own childish recollections and the few facts she had gleaned from Mr. Frere. She was quite sure in her own mind that the woman was speaking the truth, but that her own falsities confused her. Probably, as Marjory thought for the first time, her brain might have been slightly jarred by the shock of her misfortunes, and the state of fear in which she had passed her life. Marjory was beginning to understand with a sort of dim terror the infinite woe that might be worked by the mere unravelling of this weak plot. No,

she must not think of that to-night. She had only to listen and try to comprehend. Life would be quite long enough to solve other problems.

‘I am keeping you waiting, dearie,’ observed Mrs. Chard, after a while. ‘The night is wearing on, and I want to finish this miserable story. It will not do to think about that day or the next. It was winter weather, close upon Christmas, and the air was thick with unfallen snow; but there seemed a fever upon me as I tramped up and down the country-roads, stopping at cottages and asking people if they had seen the child, till they grew to dread the sight of me. And all the time my heart felt like a stone in my breast, for I knew the beggar-wife had carried you off; and when my young mistress asked me for her child, I felt that I should just fall at her feet like a dead thing. I was almost crazed with the horror of it all, and thinking of my bonnie Marjory having fallen into evil hands. Nothing but a merciful Providence kept me from self-destruction, when, on the third evening, I limped back to my cottage in the winter’s darkness, with all hope gone, and nothing but a deadly terror creeping over me. That day I had eaten

nothing. The sight of food seemed to turn me sick, but nothing would allay the fever of my thirst.

'I had left Sissie—Lilias, I mean—under a neighbour's care; and when a bright light from the uncurtained lattice streamed down the garden-path, I only said to myself that Betty Morgan knew how to make free with other people's coals, and that she must have built up a rare fire.

'The lattice was ajar, strange to say; and I was just stepping over the frozen flower-bed to close it, thinking it was Betty's carelessness, and that Sissie would catch cold, when all at once my heart seemed to stop, and for a moment there was no life in me at all. For, instead of Betty's rough figure, there was a lady, in a dress trimmed with fur, sitting by the fire, and Sissie was on her lap, with her little arms round her neck, just "loving her," as she would call it in her baby-way.

'I could not see the lady's face, but I knew that it was my young mistress; and as I stood there, holding on for support to the sill of the window, only one desperate thought came into my mind—to go away somewhere where I should

never see that mother's accusing face when she heard her child's miserable fate.

'I was turning to go, for I was clean daft with the fear and the anguish, when I heard my young mistress talking to my child in a way I could not understand.

'Sissie was squeezing her face, and laughing at her in her pretty way. "More mammies—lots of mammies for Lila," she said.

'“Do they call you Liliias, my darling?” returned my young mistress. “And I told Miriam that I always meant to call you Marjory.”

'“Margy's done!” returned Sissie, with a solemn shake of her head.

'“What, Miriam's Marjory? Oh, I hope—I hope,” in a very low voice, “that she has not lost her child! So they call you Lila, my pretty one, do they? Let me see your sweet eyes again. Yes, hazel—just like Philip's, only not so dark; and the dear fair hair is like his, too. You are Philip's little girl, aren't you, my darling? You are not like your mother, or your baby-brother one bit; but—oh, you precious little soul, I never thought you would be fair! Old nurse vowed that you would be a regular nut-

brown maid ; and that vexed me, for I did so long for my first-born to be like Philip.”

‘ Marjory, as I stood there like an outcast, homeless thing, with my head against the wall, I shook and shivered as though I had the ague to hear her going on, and yet my brain seemed on fire. My young mistress had my child on her lap, and was talking to it, believing it to be her own !

‘ Then it was that the devil took possession of me, tempting me in my hour of weakness. I was myself, and yet not myself, for I could not argue things properly. Ah, you need not shrink from me ; for it was not all wickedness, as you think. I loved my young mistress dearly—dearly, for we had been children together. She would be happier so, believing that she had her child ; and I could not bear to see her bright face overcast. One was enough to be miserable. She need never know. My child should be my sacrifice. After all, it was only a fair exchange. I had lost her child, and I would give mine instead. She should have my fair-haired, prattling little Liliass, who was so like Robert, and yet so like Philip Carr ; and would you believe me, Marjory, the thought of ex-

piating my own carelessness by this sacrifice gave me an instant's peace. It was not until it was done, and could not be undone, that the loss of my darling, my own flesh and blood, who was never to be mine again, drove me for a while crazy.

‘I could not argue things, as I said; it only passed through my brain like lightning—to leave the deluded mother in her belief, and to let things take their chance. And as I made up my mind to this, a sort of desperate courage emboldened me to face them.

‘The fire-glow had burnt down a little, and my young mistress could not see my face clearly; but hers was radiant and beautiful, though there were bright drops shining on her eyelashes. “Miriam,” she said, holding out her hands to me, for the child was still on her lap, playing with some trinkets—“Miriam, my dear woman, let me thank you for your goodness to my baby.” And before I could draw back, she had kissed me, not once, but twice, in the very fulness of her gratitude.

“Yes, let me do it,” she said, misunderstanding my shudder. “For three years you have been a mother to my darling, and watched

over her, and loved her. Oh, how I envy you those years! But I will not part with her again, my golden-haired treasure! Oh, Miriam!" with a happy little laugh; "how you and nurse used to prophesy that she would be my image! and you were wrong—both of you. See, she has her father's long nose; not a pretty one, perhaps, but it will remind me of his. Her eyes are lighter than I remember baby's to have been. But what lovely hair—just Philip's colour! Oh, he will be so proud of his little girl! You were right to call her Liliass; Marjory would not have suited her so well. Your own little girl is Marjory, is she not?" But here she caught sight of my face, and drew back with a little shock of dismay. "What is it, Miriam? You look ill and sorrowful. Is there anything wrong with the child?"

"She is lost! I have lost Marjory," I cried, throwing my apron over my head and bursting into sobs that seemed to tear me to pieces, and yet give me no relief. "Oh, what shall I do without my child?" For the sight of Liliass, sitting there unconscious and happy in her lap, playing with her diamond rings, and with her golden curls shining in the firelight, overcame me for a

moment. My young mistress wept when she saw my distress. She put down the child softly on the rug, and came to me, and implored me to tell her what I meant. She drew the story of Marjory's disappearance from me bit by bit, and tried to comfort me with the hope of soon finding her. I told her she had Sissie's beads, for I feared she might ask after them. "Marjory was crying for them that very morning, and I gave them her to play with," I said, concocting my first clumsy falsehood. "They must have attracted the beggar-wife. And she had some of Sissie's old clothes on, too." "

'Well, she talked to me, and cried over me, for my mistress had always a feeling heart; and Sissie cried too, out of pure sympathy, and clambered up in my lap and cuddled us both by turns. And I remember kissing her passionately, and imploring Mrs. Carr to allow me to keep her for a few days longer; and how the dear creature promised to do so. Only she must bring her Philip the next day to see her, she said, and so on; but I hardly heard her, for a sudden thought was turning me sick. The mark on your arm—that, of course, her mother would remember. I was turning this over in my

mind, in a confused sort of way, all the time she remained with me. But I knew what sailors did, for I had a cousin who was one; and, before another night had passed, I had managed to tattoo a faint and clumsy L in the same place in which yours was, just above the vaccination mark. It was so badly done, that no one could have mistaken it for the real mark, if the two arms had been compared; but I thought it would pass with my young mistress.'

'A week later, I saw my own child carried away; and then the emptiness, and the loneliness, and the horror of the acted lie—the first—the first in my life, Marjory, though it has brought nought but falsehood in its train—were too much for me, and I had a bad attack of brain fever.

'Betty Morgan, who nursed me, said afterwards, I talked of nothing but the children. It was Marjory and Liliass—Liliass and Marjory—day and night, calling first to one and then to another, to come and kiss me.

'And then, when I got better, a cousin fetched me away, and I went down to White-chapel, until Ephraim Chard found me out and persuaded me to marry him—which I did, just

because I was too weary of life to care what became of me, and he had a soft tongue with which to beguile a woman. And, alas ! I yielded, and from that day I had no peace, or even dared to say my soul was my own, or to cross a will that was too strong for me.

‘ But all the time I lived with my cousins at Whitechapel, and after I married Ephraim, I never let go the hope of finding you.

‘ Lilius had gone to Peru with the Carrs ; but though I had made over my own child as a peace-offering, still my conscience would not let me rest. Their real child Marjory was still missing, and I felt as though I were responsible for her. I had a sort of wild fancy in my head, that if I could only find you, the wrong might still be undone at some future time ; and, as I said before, though you may not believe me, I was that fond of you, that I was anxious to find you again for my own sake.

‘ Well, you remember that morning in Kensington Gardens, and how I claimed you for my own child. It seemed to me that nothing else would suit my purposes. I durst not tell Ephraim the truth, for I had learned to fear him as only a weak creature like myself can

fear, and yet I durst not lose sight of you entirely.

‘For four years, I had gone to bed every night quaking to think into what hands you might have fallen; and such a weight seemed lifted off me when I saw the people who had adopted you, and knew that they were real gentlefolk, and would bring you up like their own, and that you would miss nothing.

‘You need not look at me like that, Marjory, as though I had deprived you of a mother, for Miss Anne loved you like one, I am sure; and I had gone too far on a crooked road to take a straight turning. It was always my meaning to put things right some day, though that day might not come until after my death: not to lose sight of you, for I still felt responsible; I claimed you as my own, and made a bargain with the Freres that you should pay me a yearly visit. I was for ever hoping that some day the opportunity would come for me to place things on a right footing; but when years passed, and Mrs. Carr returned to England, a broken-hearted widow, bringing Liliass—my Liliass—with her, and that poor boy Mr. Barry, I had not the heart or the courage to speak, for she and Liliass doted

on each other, and it would almost have killed the poor lady to have spoken then.

'Oh, Marjory, it is true I have injured you, my poor dearie; and you were right to take a grudge against me, as you did from the time you were a mere child, for you were that sort that you could not abide what was not true; but you would not have been so hard on me if you had known the martyrdom that was to be mine, from the day the Carrs returned to England up to the present hour. To see my child treating me with the good-natured tolerance due to her mother's old servant; to hear my own daughter and Robert's address me as Miriam or Mrs. Chard; to see her lavish caresses on another woman, and pass me by with a light word of command; to love her more and more as her sweetness grew familiar to me, and yet to pretend to feel no uncommon interest in her! Oh, no wonder that there were moments when I could not bear the sight of you, Marjory; when I spoke crossly to you; when I could not endure to see you near her—I was that mad with fear and jealousy.'

'It is not difficult to understand that,' observed Marjory, with a stifled sigh; but Mrs. Chard was too much absorbed in her painful

reminiscences to heed her. After all these years of bitter concealment, her tongue was loosened, and she could speak to a human being of the trouble that lay so heavy on her soul. The relief was too great for her to check her outpourings; and as she spoke of Lillas, a brightness came into the poor faded eyes, that had known little else but tears all these years.

‘It is a pleasure, and yet a torment, to me,’ she went on, ‘to have my own dear under my roof, even if I cannot see much of her. Often and often I have crept up of an evening, when she and Mrs. Carr have been talking, just to stand outside in the darkness and hear her sweet voice laughing, or maybe singing; and more than once I have slipped inside her room when she has been asleep, just to make believe I was bidding her good-night, and to hear the soft, regular breathing. Once she stirred a bit restlessly in her sleep, and I heard her say, “Is that you, mother dear?” Eh, Marjory, I just crawled out into the passage, and sat there rocking myself and crying like a baby; for was I not her mother? though she might never know it, poor lamb, until, maybe, she may call me so in heaven.

'I was put out not a little, Marjory, at her coming with Mr. Barry so unexpectedly, just when I was awaiting your visit. I got into a panic, and lost my wits; and then I said to myself, What harm could it do to have you both together for a week? I could keep you apart, and Liliass need not know you called yourself my daughter. But when Mr. Frere accompanied you I gave myself up for lost. I knew he suspected me in some way, and I was always at my worst before him. Well, well, there is nothing more to tell; it was the shock of Liliass's accident that threw me off my guard, for I thought it was my dead child that they were bringing into the house, and what mother could stand such a sight as that? There, I have finished,' with a long, quivering sigh. 'Tell me, dearie, do you hate your old nurse for all the mischief she has done?'

'No,' returned Marjory slowly, and rousing herself with difficulty, 'I do not hate you. You have done wrong, but it seems to me that you are dying of your punishment. I am sorry for you—yes, I am even sorry for you, though you have made me do wrong, too, in giving that promise.'

‘But you will keep it, Marjory? We clasped hands over the Book, and it is binding as an oath. I could not live and know that Liliias should be taught to despise her mother. When I am dead and gone, the knowledge will not reach me—not up there, “where the weary are at rest,” Marjory; for even such a sinner may be forgiven, though it goes hard to believe it.

‘Let me pass my last few months in peace,’ she continued still more earnestly; ‘it is all I ask of you. After I am gone you will find it all written out word for word as I have told it you. You will find it in the right-hand top drawer of my old secretary, but the key is on a watch-guard round my neck. When I am dead, you may take it off me. You are a good girl not to hate me, Marjory. I would undo it all if I could, but I have not the strength or the courage for it now. Go to bed, dearie—for I dare not talk any more—and say a prayer for me if you will.’

Marjory rose at once. ‘If you care to hear me say that I forgive you, I will say that word,’ she returned, speaking in set, dry tones. ‘I believe that you do repent of all these falsehoods; but I think—I think,’ very solemnly, ‘that it will be better that we do not meet again—that, when

I once leave you, it will be on the full understanding that you do not expect me to sleep under your roof again.'

'I am not asking it,' in a dejected tone; 'but you will come to me when I am dying, Marjory?'

'Yes, if you send for me I will come. I will try not to think more hardly of you than I can, though you have caused such bitter confusion in my life. Perhaps I shall be able to make more excuse for you when I have thought it all out: anyway, I wish you to rest sure of my forgiveness.'

'Thank you, dearie; then, good-night!'

'Good-night!' returned Marjory, in the same forced voice; but she took no notice of the hand that Mrs. Chard held out to her.

'I cannot take it—I cannot—I cannot!' muttered Marjory through her teeth, as she crept cautiously past the closed door of the sleeper, and took refuge in her own room.

The town clock was striking one as she drew a chair to the bedside and laid her head against the pillow. She was utterly weary, faint and exhausted in body; but the strained tension of her brain, the crowd of conflicting thoughts that

passed through her mind, made sleep impossible. She would sit there until morning should bring greater calmness ; and then, perhaps, she might stretch herself on the bed, and court an hour's forgetfulness. She had lighted no candle ; yet, after a little, the room was not dark to her. An eerie light made objects perceptible to her, even the grim blackness of the wall before her window. The house seemed full of ghostly presences, of dead silences, of faint gropings, and shadowy outlines ; and yet no sense of fear crossed her mind. She must think it all out from the beginning, so she told herself. She had hours in which to do it ; and yet when the grey dawn began to light up the horizon, Marjory still sat there, with strained, wide-open eyes, and the pulses beating like hammers in her temples.

Now and then, as the hours passed, broken exclamations rose to her lips, showing the drift of her thoughts as they surged unbidden into speech.

'Who am I?—not Marjory Deane at all. I am Liliias—Liliias, and my mother is sleeping upstairs !'

A smile of exquisite tenderness curved her lips at this.

'I have been looking for her all my life, and

now I have found her. Oh, that is what I wanted—a mother that I could love! And Barry, too, my brother! Oh, how rich I am! Happy girl, to have found a mother and brother in one night!

The brief ecstasy vanished, and reality, in its coldest aspect, jarred on her sensitive nerves.

'It will break Liliás's heart. My happiness will be the ruin of hers. I must destroy hers to build up my own, and—and '—here the keenest anguish smote her—'my mother will not want me. It is too late. Nature will do nothing for me. After all these years I could not supersede Liliás!'

Then again :

'She was Sissie—poor little Sissie—my own foster-sister! We slept in the same cradle. It is I who am to wreck her happiness. Oh, merciful heavens! what am I to do? what can I do? And yet, right must be done and the truth spoken. Oh, if I could only ask some one!—if Mr. Frere and Anne could help me!' And then she wrung her hands and cried out in her helplessness. And so she passed the night, until the first sunbeam shone in at the window; and then, utterly spent, she threw herself,

dressed as she was, on the bed, and fell into a heavy sleep of exhaustion.

It was nearly noon when the cool fragrance of a bunch of violets touching her cheek woke her, and she started up to find Liliás standing beside her bed, looking at her anxiously.

‘What does this mean?’ she asked, sitting on the bed and leaning over the pillow to kiss her. ‘You are dressed; you have not been to bed; and you have dark circles round your eyes, as though you were ill.’

‘I was up late with Mrs. Chard, and—and I was too tired to undress,’ faltered Marjory. ‘But you—you ought not to be here; you are so pale. You should not have taken the trouble to come to me.’

‘They said you had overslept yourself, and I wanted to surprise you. Mother does not know. I slipped downstairs the moment she left the room. I was on the couch, talking to Barry, and feeling so strong and well; so I thought it would be such fun to wake you myself. Mr. Gilbert says I may go out for an hour to-morrow, so I do not mean to be treated any longer as an invalid.’

‘You must take more care of yourself,’ re-

turned Marjory faintly. 'You are looking far too delicate, now you are up.'

'Lilias, Lilias!' echoed from above, and at the sound of that voice Marjory trembled all over.

'There, go—go!' she said, almost pushing Lilias from her. 'That is her voice. She wants you.'

'But there is no need to send me away in such a hurry,' pouted Lilias. 'If I waited a moment and pretended not to hear, she would come and fetch me. No, I am not going to leave you. You do look so ill, and mother will think of something to do you good. She always does, you know.'

And, to Marjory's utter despair, she maintained her position, and a moment afterwards Mrs. Carr entered the room.

Marjory closed her eyes, for all the blood in her body seemed to surge to her head suddenly. At least, she could plead with truth to an intense headache, for the throbbing of her temples amounted to agony.

'Oh, Lilias, Lilias, this is very imprudent!' began Mrs. Carr reproachfully; but Lilias, as usual, silenced her with a kiss.

‘I was so dreadfully in need of exercise,’ she pleaded, ‘and I did so want to wake Marjory. Does she not look ill, mother? She was up late with Mrs. Chard, and then she was too tired to undress.’

‘Yes; but you must undress now, and go to bed like a good child,’ returned Mrs. Carr, laying her cool hand on the girl’s burning forehead. ‘Lilias, you chatterbox, you must not talk any more. I can see what is the matter. Your father had these headaches, and nothing but quiet would do him any good. My dear,’ as Marjory shivered under her touch, ‘I will stay and help you, if you will allow me, while Lilias goes back to her couch. No, you must not refuse,’ as Marjory’s lips quivered with the effort to speak. ‘I am so used to nursing, and there is nothing I like so well as helping people.’

‘You will be all right if mother helps you,’ echoed Lilias brightly, as she left the room.

Poor Marjory! The sudden crisis, the intense physical and mental pain that she was enduring, seemed to paralyze her. She wanted to refuse Mrs. Carr’s help, to implore to be left alone; but all power of speech seemed taken from her.

Mrs. Carr took things into her own motherly hands. The girl looked very ill, she thought, but she knew exactly how to treat her. When Marjory refused to undress wholly, and would only lay aside her gown and put on her dressing-gown, she had little idea of what was passing through the girl's mind, and only treated it smilingly as a youthful whim.

'You shall do as you like, dear,' she said pleasantly. 'I never tease my patients, but I think you would have been more comfortable if you had really gone to bed.'

But Marjory only shuddered in answer. She remembered the tell-tale mark upon her arm, and the clumsy imitation on Lilius's; and, with that promise scorching her soul like a lie, she dared not run any risk of discovery.

It was well, perhaps, for Marjory that her physical suffering dulled and numbed her mental pain. She lay in a sort of dream—conscious, yet without feeling, except the acute throbbing in her head—waited on by the mother who did not know her.

How comforting was the semi-darkness that had relieved the morning glare! how refreshing the cool air that stole through the open windows!

A pleasant warmth diffused itself through her cold limbs ; gentle hands changed the fragrant wet cloths on her head, and unloosened the plaits of heavy hair. Those hands, so firm, so cool, so beautiful, seemed to mesmerize Marjory.

She had not opened her eyes, for she dared not look in her mother's face ; but once she whispered through her white lips something about Liliás—begging her to go to her.

‘ Yes, I shall go to Liliás presently. You need not trouble about me, you poor child ! I shall come in and out, and look after you through the day ; but it is only quiet and sleep you want. You young things can never afford to lose your natural rest, and you have been wearing yourself out for all of us. Oh, I know these headaches ! Liliás's father used to have them. They would last from morning until evening, and I was the only one he would allow near him. Are you cold ? ’ as Marjory gave a long shiver at her words.

These headaches, at which Anne had often marvelled, were a heritage that came from her dead father.

So the day passed on. Marjory slept a little,

and sometimes, when she woke, her thoughts seemed to wander and lose themselves. Once Mrs. Chard came and looked at her, but Marjory turned her face away and pretended to be sleeping; and she never willingly unclosed her eyes while Mrs. Carr was in the room.

As the evening closed in, and she found herself alone, she dragged herself off the bed to prepare for the night. As she passed the glass, such a white-lipped heavy-eyed creature met her view, that she hardly recognised herself.

'You have dispensed with my help,' observed Mrs. Carr, smiling, as she entered shortly afterwards, and smoothed the disordered bed. 'Now you will sleep like a baby to-night, and wake up a different girl to-morrow. What are you doing, my dear?' as Marjory intercepted the busy hand, and touched it, oh so humbly and gratefully, with her lips.

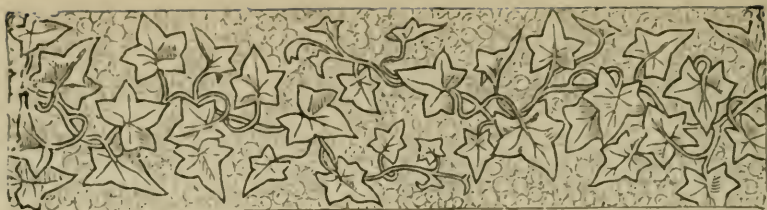
'Let me do it!' exclaimed Marjory wildly. 'I want to thank you, and I cannot.' And then, moved to some sudden passionate impulse, she threw her arms round Mrs. Carr's neck. 'Try to love me a little, for I love you so very, very much.'

'Hush, my dear! Of course Liliass and I will

love you,' she returned kindly. This little outburst surprised and touched her. She thought the girl was hysterical, and soothed and kissed her, as she would have soothed Liliás.

But after she had left her, Marjory hid her face in the pillow, and burst into passionate sobs. 'Oh, it is too hard—to be near her, and yet for her not to know me! How shall I bear it—to keep silence and not to tell? But I must be near you, mother, whatever the pain costs me. I cannot see you go away with Liliás and leave me behind.'





CHAPTER V.

‘ PLEASE BE SERIOUS A MOMENT. ’

DINNER was just over at Murrel’s End, and Mr. Frere had placed his sister’s favourite chair by the window, that she might look out on the beds of yellow and violet pansies that lay like motionless butterflies under the sweet spring light. It was nearly the end of April, but the fire still burnt cheerily ; and Fluff lay like a grey muff, dropped down accidentally on the white rug.

A shade was on Anne’s gentle face as she sat with her knitting beside her, but with her little hands lying idle on her lap, while she looked at the pink sunset clouds and the limes rippling softly in the breeze, or turned her head to watch her brother’s desultory movements about the room.

Mr. Frere was one of those men who always look to best advantage in evening dress. As a

general rule, he was somewhat careless in his attire—preferring an old coat to a new one, holding the philosophy of clothes a little loosely, and yet stamping everything he wore with a certain fashion of his own; but in the sober black and white of the Englishman's evening costume he looked in perfect harmony. 'Quite aristocratic,' Mrs. Curwin would say, 'with that silvery grey hair and clever face,' an opinion in which Anne secretly coincided.

This hour was considered by them both as the most sociable hour of the day, as Mr. Frere was given to inform his womenfolk rather frequently. 'Without being a gastronomist, or being in any way addicted to epicurism,' he would say, 'I always feel, when I have dined, in that pleasant mellow condition that leads to loquacity; a glass of good claret, with the knowledge that an excellent cigar is to follow, makes a man feel in good-humour with himself and his surroundings. His moral frame expands into benevolence; his intellect widens; witty speeches drop as easily from his lips as roses and diamonds from the girl in the fairy-story.'

'What a pity that women do not always drink claret too!' Anne would answer, in a

quizzical tone. But she, too, loved this hour, when Capel would walk up and down the room, talking of all things in heaven and earth. The claret might be excellent—everything was good of its kind at Murrel's End, nothing but the best suiting Mr. Frere's fastidiousness—but she knew how little he thought of such things. His simple genial nature was always ready to expand, and he would talk as freely to her as though she were one of his choice spirits at the club.

To-night, his conversation had been more than usually diffuse. As he had carved the fish, he had harangued Anne on the folly and extravagance of colonial wars, and the pitifulness of the economy that could waste good English blood in combats with savages.

'Ours is a greedy Government,' he observed. 'We sit in our island like a spider in its web, and we run out lines to all quarters of the globe, trying to bring one native power after another into our meshes.'

From this subject he passed lightly to the rising power of trade. 'Trade is a mighty power at the present day. Fashion and rank are legitimizing it. We are studying the romance

of business. Mark my words, Anne—a good day is coming for the middle classes of England. Work will be declared honourable. Younger sons of needy noblemen will recruit their exhausted fortunes in city offices, and impoverished gentlewomen will turn dressmakers and milliners, and work up the philosophy of clothes into a fine art, only secondary to painting and sculpture. Idleness and helplessness will be declared vulgar. You know the derivation of the word lady? And as Anne shook her head. ‘*Hláf-weardige*, bread-keeper; from *hláf*, loaf, and *weardinn*, to look after. The same meaning attaches to the title lord.’

‘Bread-keepers need not be bread-winners, Capel.’

‘My good Anne, half a loaf is better than no bread; but if the half-loaf fail, surely the *hláf-weardige*’s duty is to provide the loaf. Eve had to turn dairy-maid probably from the time she was ejected from Eden, and her feminine descendants will find that honest work will not soil the fairest hand.’

This was a subject on which Anne could talk; her ideas were a little hazy on colonial wars. But when Mr. Frere had aired his ideas on this

topic, he strayed off to Darwinism, and from thence to ants, and finally landed himself and Anne on the subject of phrenology and the arguments in favour of Comte's philosophy, in the midst of which Anne retired silently to her chair and looked out absently at the lime-trees.

'Capel,' she said suddenly, arresting this flow of argumentative eloquence, 'I wish you would leave Comte alone for to-night. Yesterday it was Oliver Cromwell, and the evening before we were deep in Boswell's Johnson and Mrs. Thrale-Piozzi. To-night I want the conversation in my own hands; there is that letter of Marjory's to discuss.'

He was standing with his back to her, fingering the books on the table, or she would have seen the swift indefinable change that passed over his face at the mention of Marjory's name. But a minute afterwards he came up to her, with his usual good-humoured look.

'Ah, the letter you read to me at luncheon! Well, it seems to me, Marjory has a right to amuse herself. There is nothing to discuss there.'

'Sit down a minute,' she returned patiently.

‘I have wanted to talk to you all day, Capel, but you have put me off so. This letter of Marjory’s troubles me.’

‘Why, it is a good letter,’ he said lightly, taking it out of her hand. ‘The child has crossed her *t*’s and dotted her *i*’s, and her punctuation is as correct as most females’. I do not think the feminine intellect ever will completely master the difficult art of punctuation ; it is too fond of notes of admiration and interrogation, and too loath to use the full stop.’

Anne shook her head at him.

‘Capel, what has come to you ? Why will you never talk to me about Marjory now ?’

‘Am I not criticizing her letter ?’ he returned, with the same provoking good-humour. ‘When you write to her, Anne, I wish you would tell her, from me, that the elegant letter-writer of the nineteenth century ought not to indulge in such long rambling sentences. She has completely lost her nominative in one place. I am not at all sure whether she is alluding to Miss Carr or herself.’

‘Capel, please be serious a moment. You know these people—the Carrs ? You like them. But do you not think it strange that Marjory

should be so infatuated with them that she must accompany them home? She has been away a whole month, and yet she means to give us only three days.'

'There is nothing in that,' he replied carelessly; 'Marjory is young. In youth, one is addicted to sudden friendships. Miss Carr is an amiable girl: I took a fancy to her myself. She is a perfect young gentlewoman, and would satisfy even you, Anne. Fortescue knows Mrs. Carr, and speaks most highly of the family. There can be no harm in Marjory wishing to pay them a visit.'

'No harm, perhaps; but St. Kilda is more than two hundred miles away, and Marjory has never been away from us before, except to Whitecliffe. I am afraid you will laugh at me, Capel — I am not generally superstitious: presentiments are foolish things—but I have such a feeling against her going.'

'Why, what nonsense!' he returned, a little impatiently. 'You are like the hen with one chick—you do not like to trust the girl out of your sight. My dear, what have I often told you about old maids' children? They are over-ruled, and over-talked, and fussed over until

they are perfectly unlike other healthy young people. We are sober, staid, middle-aged folk: we cannot hope to keep Marjory for ever under our wing—she will have her peep at the world, like other young folk.'

This ruffled Anne's smooth plumage a little.

'We have done all we could to make her happy,' she returned, in a plaintive voice. 'Few girls have been so petted. You never wished to part with her before, Capel. You always say the house is so dull without Marjory, and yet you take her part in this.'

'Yes, I do,' he returned, quite seriously. 'I have been young myself, and I know how one yearns to work off one's restlessness; one longs for fresh faces and pastures new. Young limbs must stretch themselves; young eyes will be curious, and long to explore under new horizons. If you take my advice, Anne—which you never do, for I always take yours—I would give Marjory her head. She is a generous, high-spirited creature; but she will not bear the curb, unless you use it very lightly.'

Anne looked at him with eyes full of reproach.

'How you talk, dear! Have I ever put my wishes against Marjory's?—have I not always

studied her interests before my own ? If I am not anxious for her to go to St. Kilda's, it is not because I cannot bear her out of my sight—it is only that I have this strange feeling against it. All this month I have not been quite happy about her. She says so little in her letters ; there is a strained, unnatural tone about them ; she never mentions Mrs. Chard ; she speaks little about the Carrs—less than ever the last week—and yet she tells me that her heart is set on accompanying the strangers.'

'They are not strangers to her,' he returned pointedly. 'She has helped to nurse Miss Carr. By-the-bye, Anne, was it not thoughtful of Marjory to keep the news of the accident from us until Miss Carr was well again ? She knew how it would trouble you to hear they had been in such danger.'

'I wish she had told me more about it,' replied his sister ; 'but Marjory's letters have been so short and unsatisfactory. They are always affectionate, but they are not as bright as usual. I wonder you have not noticed it, Capel ; you are always so sharp-sighted where Marjory is concerned.'

'Come, come ! I hope I am not as fanciful as

you, Anne,' he returned, with rather a forced laugh.

He had shaken his head in secret over these letters, wondering what had come to the girl, and why her fun seemed to have forsaken her : no little familiar jokes, no girlish drolleries—nothing but grave, everyday facts and laboured attempts at descriptions; not as Marjory usually wrote—out of her warm heart and glowing imagination. But not for worlds would he hint to Anne that he was dissatisfied also.

'I tell you what !' he said suddenly, breaking the brief silence ; 'if you will let the child have her way and go to the Carrs, I will promise to run down by-and-by and have a look at her. Fortescue tells me there is a tolerable inn at St. Kilda's, and that they provide excellent breakfasts—trout fresh from the river, and real Westmoreland ham. I should not mind doing a little fishing on my own account. I might take the Lakes on my way, too. I could bring you a report of Marjory's friends. Englishwomen are never seen to better advantage than at home.'

Anne raised her quiet eyes and looked at him. Her smile seemed to say, 'Some one else is restless, too ;' but her only words were :

'Thank you, dear ; that is a very nice plan, and will ease my mind greatly.'

'And you will not trouble that wise little head of yours any more ?' he asked, half jesting and half anxious.

'Not if I can help it. I will at least keep my unruly member in order. You are lord and master here, Capel ; and if you say Marjory is to go, you shall be obeyed.'

'I think we have no right to refuse such a reasonable request,' he returned, rising as though the subject were finished. 'Now Fluff and I will have our prow, and when I come in we will do a little of Carlyle's "Past and Present ;"' for Mr. Frere had lately taken to read to his sister of an evening.

Anne sighed rather heavily as he quitted the room ; the pink glow of the sunset clouds seemed melting into faint streaky greys ; the soft spring light was fading into twilight ; the limes grew dark before her eyes. Anne shivered a little as she left the window and sat down beside the fire, stretching out her delicate palms to the warmth, as though in need of visible comfort. Anne's quiet spirit was strangely disturbed. If she had spoken aloud, her thoughts would have

fashioned themselves into oddly-broken sentences.

'It is always so,' she was saying to herself; 'it is always we who are old, who have our lives lying behind us, who must give way and stand aside.

'“Give, and it shall be given unto you,” is the true Gospel measure, but they will not have it so. They say, “Give all; it is our right to receive; it is not for us to pay back; we must be loved for our own sweet sakes; mothers ask for nothing again, and you are not even a mother.”

'Then, again, he says she is restless. I know it, and I have long known it. Is restlessness the heritage of youth only? for Capel is restless, too; they are neither of them happy; they both long for the impossible. Capel?—yes—I know—I know; but I dare not open his eyes to his madness. Poor Capel! he calls it by every name but the right one. When the knowledge comes, he will struggle against it, but it will master him; all his life he has wanted it, and the Almighty has seen fit to deny it to him. Some people have their lives spoiled for them, like his and mine; but I am a woman—a woman can always live in other people's lives; he wants to live

his own. Men are so ; they want the best ; they think it their right. God has made men so.'

Anne was wandering vaguely among the shadows she was conjuring up. Her simple, reasonable nature was not given to fanciful imaginations ; in reality, she was practical—almost prosaic—but her intense love for her brother and the child of her adoption made her clear-sighted on their behalf. She foresaw the difficulties that lay before them, and would have smoothed them with her loving hands if they would have permitted it.

She shook off her gloomy thoughts at last with an effort, and smiled at herself as she rang for lights.

'Here I am, talking about presentiments like a Scotch wife,' she said, scolding herself vigorously. 'It is not like me to indulge in whimsies. Mackay,' as that ancient domestic entered with the lamp, 'we must see about getting Miss Marjory's room ready. She is only coming for three nights, but I should like it to be in its usual order.'

'Miss Marjory is taking to gadding ; that is an ill sign in young folk,' grumbled Mackay, whose temper was not improved with age. 'What

do they want better than their home? Once master was for ever going away, but he seems to have settled down now, as a gentleman ought at his time of life; but there, Miss Marjory was always for having her own way,' finished Mackay, in an injured voice; for, like the rest of the household, she doated on Marjory, for all her grumbling. It was her opinion that Murrel's End was never the same place when the young mistress was away.





CHAPTER VI.

MARJORY COMES HOME.

MR. FRERE was at the station when Marjory arrived. She knew it would be so, and was looking for him before he had caught sight of the tall figure in brown just alighting from the railway-carriage. It was nearly a month since they had met, for circumstances had prevented him from again taking up his abode at the Crown, and the weeks had seemed strangely long to him. Nevertheless, there was no eagerness in his manner, no undue haste in his leisurely walk, as he strolled up the platform to meet her.

But the vivid brightness of his eyes, as she approached in her careless, graceful fashion, spoke of a repressed, carefully concealed joy. He had seen no one like her, he said to himself,

all these weeks, no one who could compare with her in the least ; yet as he greeted her, and saw her face in the full light of the April sunshine, he started, as though he found her unexpectedly changed.

'I knew you would meet me,' she said, with something of the condescending graciousness of a princess. 'I saw you long before you saw me, and Fluff has come too !' lifting the little animal in her arms and caressing it.

'They are bringing out your luggage. I have secured a fly. Shall we go now ?' he asked by way of saying something, and to hide his sudden shock of apprehension.

What had happened to her ? What strange, undefinable change had come over her ? Only a few short weeks, and yet it was a different Marjory !

He placed himself opposite to her in the fly, and watched her furtively as she caressed Fluff or gazed out half-dreamily at the yellow gorse-covered common. She was not ill, he told himself. Her cheek was embrowned with sun and sea-air, but she was certainly thinner. Her large brown eyes had a softened, almost a wistful look in them, and the mouth had new curves.

As they climbed up the steep hill leading from the town to Woodleigh Down, she seemed almost lost to his presence. The smile which he had loved to watch breaking over her face had not once greeted him. She was graver, older. She looked—and yet it was impossible—as though trouble had overtaken her.

‘Marjory,’ he said, attempting to rouse her, ‘I hope you are glad to be at home again.’

‘There is Murrel’s End,’ she returned evasively. ‘How lovely the limes look! Woodleigh Down never looks better than in spring dress. Those tender greens are so vivid.’

‘But you do not tell me that you are glad to be here,’ he returned, watching her with still keener anxiety.

She started, and, to his surprise, her eyes filled suddenly with tears.

‘Oh, how I have wanted you—both you and Anne! What a long, long time it seems; and now I am going away again! Oh, there is Anne!’ as she caught sight of the little figure in black flitting between the shrubs; and, almost before the fly had stopped, she had sprung to the ground.

There was nothing missing in the loving greeting that passed between her and this dearest friend.

‘Oh, Anne, how lovely you look! I am so glad to see your sweet face again!’ cried the girl, moved to unwonted demonstration.

‘My darling, if you knew how glad I am!’ returned Anne tenderly. ‘Come to your room, Marjory—Capel will see after the luggage. I must have you all to myself.’

No; she had noticed nothing, Mr. Frere decided within himself. A beautiful colour had come to Marjory’s face at the sight of Anne, and the flush had not yet died away. Would that lost pathetic look come back into her eyes, as they talked together?—that look that had filled him with uneasy alarm; for it spoke of some new experience unshared with them—some girlish sorrow locked up in the recesses of her own breast.

Nothing could have been sweeter than Marjory’s greeting; but before many minutes her manner had changed. At the first sight of her room, she had turned suddenly pale, and had burst into tears; and yet, when Anne questioned her on the reason for her agitation,

her explanation had been vague and unsatisfactory.

‘ Oh, don’t ask me !—it is nonsense, of course ! Perhaps I am tired ; I did not sleep well last night ; I do not always sleep well—not as I used. It is so still and quiet here—it seems to oppress me, somehow.’

‘ Your own home oppress you, Marjory ?’

‘ Never mind what I say. I have wanted you always,’ with another sob. ‘ There, take your old chair, and I will sit at your feet as I used to do in my childish days. Why cannot we be children always, Anne ?—thinking is such hard work when we get older. There, now, we can be comfortable,’ wrapping Anne’s arms round her, and laying her head in her lap.

The very action—so unlike Marjory, for she was rarely demonstrative even with Anne—filled her friend with vague uneasiness. What possessed her child, that she should sit there hiding her face and saying nothing ? And yet Anne knew that the tears were still flowing.

But with womanly tact and patience she said nothing for a long time ; only smoothed the glossy brown hair softly, as one would smooth the plumage of a bird. Marjory would surely

tell her soon what ailed her ; she would wait till she was ready to speak.

But presently Marjory lifted her face, and her eyes were dry and hot, and a tremulous smile was on her lips.

‘How silly I am,’ she said almost petulantly ; ‘one would think something had happened, to see me behave so foolishly. You never knew I was nervous before, did you, Anne ? and yet I must be, crying like a baby, just because everything looks so beautiful.’

‘Tell me what troubled you, darling ?’ but Marjory dropped her eyes ; her mood had evidently changed.

‘I always have been a trouble to myself as long as I can remember,’ she said impatiently, ‘and I am sure I have been a trouble to you. Please do not question me ; it was only an odd sort of nervousness. Whitecliffe always upsets me, and a whole month there ! Anne, I will never go near the place again—never—never !’ her voice shaking with some strong passion.

‘No, dear,’ hastening to soothe her. ‘I will speak to Capel. ‘I will not have you tried like this. Have things been so bad, then ? I hoped you and Mrs. Chard——’ but, at the sound

of that name Marjory showed increased agitation.

‘Anne, if you love me, never talk to me of her again. I owe her no duty; I will pay her none. Neither she nor Mr. Frere shall force me there again.’

Anne’s face brightened; she thought she had discovered the reason for Marjory’s strange behaviour. She had been a whole month under that woman’s roof, and she had been weary of the intercourse with her.

‘Dear, I am sure Capel would not wish it. I cannot bear to see you fret like this. Why did you not tell us you were wretched, and Capel would have come to you at once? Try and forget it all now, Marjory; you are my child, not hers, and you are safe with me at home.’

A slow shiver passed over Marjory at this soothing speech. Alas! alas! that Anne’s gentle lips should speak such words. Her child? not hers now, for nature has claims paramount to adoption. But Marjory’s silence had another interpretation.

‘Yes, you know you are safe with me; we are so sure of one another, are we not, Marjory? What a pity you are going away so soon with

those people ! you must tell me all about them, dear. Capel has quite fallen in love with your friend Miss Carr.'

Marjory drew her hands away suddenly.

'We have so much to talk about,' she said quickly, almost feverishly. 'But I must dress now, Anne ; dinner will be ready ;' and as Anne's orderly soul could not deny the wisdom of this proceeding, she reluctantly left the room. She wished Marjory had asked her to stay and help her. But Marjory felt a strong need of solitude ; the hysterical lump would keep rising in her throat. The sight of her girlish room, with the evening sunshine streaming on pictures and statuettes ; the white-curtained bed, where she had slept so peacefully, with no tragedy hidden in her breast, brought a load of sadness to her mind ; never more would such careless rest be hers !

She felt almost like a ghost revisiting its old haunts, as she compared her present feelings with those of a month ago.

Then she had been an idle visionary girl, full of fragmentary discontents, seasoned with undisciplined tempers ; now she was a woman, who had tasted of the fruit of good and evil, who knew of the force of temptation, and how

the unwary can fall into pits of their own devising, who had seen the firm ground opening beneath her feet, with the yawning chasm of a moral earthquake; the Marjory who held a tragic secret in her frightened breast was not the Marjory who had slept here a month ago.

A strange conflict, terrible in its sadness, was harassing her. Inclination and hasty impulse were at variance with conscience; duty with rigid rectitude whispered to her: ‘Be true to your honest self; remain quietly and patiently with the friends who have watched over your infancy, until that woman’s death unseals your lips; do not enter secretly and as a stranger into your mother’s house.’

But impulse spoke more loudly, ‘I cannot remain here with this secret between me and them; it would destroy all enjoyment and all peace; they would see that I was unhappy; I should grow weary of acting a part; my reticence would wound their feelings. It is far better for me to go.’

And then jealousy, that most masterful and cruel of all passions, stepped in, and secured the victory. ‘They shall not go without me. I must follow them; I must make myself necessary

to them ; I must try to win their love, that when I have to assert myself, I may not be regarded as a stranger. No one shall rob me of my mother, now I have found her. I would rather serve as a servant in that house, than remain here, ignored and disowned. Perhaps when I am there I shall find my clue to the right path ; light will come—it must—out of this bitter doubt and darkness.’

Day and night this passionate conflict had warred within her, until she had grown dull and weary with it. ‘Come what may, I will go,’ was her final resolution ; and after this nothing would have moved her.

A lifetime of longing had prepared her for this sudden response. The cry of nature is a powerful one ; a passionate love, all the stronger that it must be repressed, had woke up in Marjory’s soul. Her mother, her newly-found mother, was her one thought ; and Anne’s gentle love paled beside it, as the pure moonbeams would pale beside the scorching glare of the mid-day sun.

Such were the thoughts that were pressing on Marjory as she put on her white gown, after loosening and rearranging the thick brown braids

that over-weighted the small head ; her arms fell wearily to her side when she had finished. Mr. Frere, as he watched her entrance, was struck still more by the girl's altered looks. Had she been crying, for surely her eyelids were reddened ? but while he questioned himself anxiously on this point, Marjory was talking in her old careless way.

‘ So my words have come true, Anne, and Nellie and Mr. Brooks are engaged ; I must go over to Parkside to-morrow.’

‘ They will be expecting you, dear. Mr. Brooks is dining there to-night ; he is certainly very devoted. I went round there last week to congratulate her. Nellie was looking very pretty and happy ; she takes very kindly to her responsibilities. Popples and Susie had been spending the day there.’

‘ Fancy Nellie being Popples's mamma !’ returned Marjory solemnly ; ‘ how I should like to forbid the banns ! Mr. Frere, I can see you are laughing, but this is no occasion for mirth. Nellie is my friend, and she is far too dear and pretty for Mr. Brooks ; he is not half good enough for her.’

‘ I never think men are good enough for

women,' returned Mr. Frere, more seriously than usual.

'Do you remember the renowned Mrs. Poyser's speech?' asked Anne, in a funny little voice—"Women are foolish, but God Almighty made them to match the men."'

'My opinion of Mr. Brooks is, that there is not enough of him; he is good-looking, but he is shallow; his character wants backbone, and then I am afraid he is a little selfish.'

'A common masculine fault, Marjory Daw. A man is generally A 1 in his own estimation; the lords of creation are generally fond of their own way.'

'I found Mrs. Walford in rather a hazy condition,' continued Anne, pleased that Marjory should be so interested. 'One minute she seemed elated—"Brooklyn is such a pretty house, my dear," she kept on saying, "and then Eustace is a rising man;" and the next minute she was speaking of the poor children as an encumbrance. "It seemed terrible for the poor darling to be a stepmother at her age"; you know her way.'

'Oh yes,' returned Marjory absently. Her thoughts were straying; this marrying and

giving in marriage seemed so strange to her. She almost smiled at the idea that she had ever had a chance of winning the prize; her lip curled involuntarily at the remembrance of sundry compliments paid to her by the handsome widower. Poor dear Nellie! she was much to be pitied, she thought, dismissing the subject with a fleeting sigh.

But Anne's next remark brought a vivid rush of colour to her cheeks.

'Marjory, my child, you have told us nothing about your new friends. I have heard about Miss Carr from Capel; he positively raved about her. But you have told us so little in your letters about her mother.'

Marjory bent over her plate; the dusky crimson mounted to her forehead.

'It is so hard to describe people,' she said quickly; but her very voice sounded differently to Mr. Frere's ears. 'I thought I told you, Anne, that she was very beautiful. She is not like anyone I have ever seen; her features are so fine, just as though they were cut in cameo, all the lines so perfect.'

'Capel told me that her daughter was not at all pretty; rather plain, in fact.'

'They are very unlike each other,' returned Marjory, speaking in the lowest key possible, as though she had lost her voice. 'You would not call Liliás plain if you knew her; she has the sweetest expression, and then it changes so. Mr. Barry is more like his mother. He would be so handsome if his face were a little less thin and worn.'

'Poor fellow! Capel seemed so interested in him. It is such a pity that he should be so afflicted. It is very kind of them to invite you, Marjory. Mr. Fortescue says they are such warm-hearted, hospitable people. He stayed there six weeks once.'

'Under the circumstances, it was wonderfully kind,' replied the girl, in a dry, hard voice; 'but I suppose they thought me lady-like. I do credit to your bringing up, Anne.'

Mr. Frere and his sister exchanged a silent glance. This proud speech was so like Marjory. She had made the acquaintance of these strangers under such disadvantageous circumstances. If they had met her under their roof, it would have been far better; but to recognise her claims to equality and friendship at the moment they discovered her to be the daughter of their old

servant, was a compliment to their discernment and Marjory's aristocratic bearing. Her refinement and cultured speech must be indeed a surprise to Mrs. Carr.

Mr. Frere was so strangely silent this evening, that Anne found it difficult to satisfy her innocent curiosity about Marjory's new friends. She hazarded a few more questions, which Marjory answered as briefly as possible. And then she said, with the confidence of one who has good news to impart :

‘I suppose you will not stay very long with these people, Marjory? Capel means to come and look after you. He says there is a capital inn at St. Kilda's where he could stay and enjoy some fishing.’

Marjory started, and looked up uneasily. As he met her eyes, they seemed to question his purpose. Mr. Frere saw that the news was unwelcome. It troubled her to know that he was coming.

‘It would be better not to do that,’ she said slowly; ‘it would look strange; as though you could not trust me with them.’

‘I differ from you there,’ he answered cheerfully.

'It would be embarrassing to Mrs. Carr,' she continued more firmly. 'Mr. Fortescue talks about their hospitality. They would not hear of your remaining at an inn; you would be invited to Mavisbank.'

'Is there any legitimate reason against my accepting any such invitation?' was his cool response to this.

'No; but your following me would look so strange—so uncalled for—I am not a child,' she stammered, with an annoyed air. For the first time in her life she felt his presence would be unwelcome to her. The tender watchfulness implied in this resolution failed to touch her. She wanted to be free: away from their loving surveillance, their questioning looks. Mr. Frere read all this in her face, and it only strengthened him in his purpose. 'Something had gone wrong with the girl; he must follow her, and find it out.'

'I shall come upon you when you least expect it,' he said, in a rallying voice. 'Perhaps you will have come out to sketch the old castle, and you will see me sauntering up the road with a knapsack.'

'I see you are determined to make me un-

comfortable,' she answered, with decided temper, as she rose from the table.

But as he opened the door for her with a light, mocking bow, she could make nothing of his look. There was fun in his eyes, but there was something else beside. What was it? Marjory asked herself, as she walked down the garden-path. But as she puzzled herself over it, he came up to her, and began to talk in his old manner of the books they had both been reading, and the paper he was writing for the *Nineteenth Century*, on old myths and superstitions—gliding from one topic to another in easy fashion, until her face had lost its shade, and she grew bright and interested.

'Now we will go in to Anne, Marjory Daw,' he said gently; 'and you must not be cross with me again to-night.'





CHAPTER VII.

‘TELL ME WHAT TROUBLES YOU.’

MARJORY paid an early visit to Park-side. Mrs. Walford and Nellie were still sitting over their late breakfast, when Marjory entered the room unannounced. Nellie jumped up, and greeted her friend rapturously. She looked prettier than ever in her dainty morning costume: a diamond twinkled on the little plump white hand. Marjory held it for a moment, and gravely inspected the ring, at which Nellie blushed still more rosily.

‘Marjory, were you very surprised when you got my letter?’ she whispered.

‘Not at all,’ was the nonchalant reply. ‘Mrs. Walford, perhaps you will tell me what is the proper thing to do under the circumstances? Am I to congratulate Nellie, or condole with her?’

'Oh, my dear,' returned Mrs. Walford, in a cosy voice, 'is it not dreadful to think of poor Nellie having four little girls to manage? I tell dear Eustace it is such a responsibility for so young a girl.'

'They are such dears!' returned the little bride-elect, in the happiest way imaginable. 'I am so fond of them, Marjory. Susie is a darling, and Popples is so delicious; and I think Dora and Ada are such nice children.'

'Just listen to her, Marjory!' exclaimed Mrs. Walford resignedly. 'Is it not strange, at her age, to like the prospect of being a stepmother? I would never have done such a thing myself—widowers were never in my line. But there! some men can talk you into anything. I do believe Nellie will be quite pleased to hear them call her mamma.'

This made Nellie blush still more, but she maintained her point bravely.

'I wish mamma would not talk so,' she said, with a charming pout. 'Of course I must be fond of Eustace's children; but you need not believe her, Marjory—she already spoils them dreadfully.'

'Well, my dear, a little spoiling never hurts

good children ; and, as I tell Eustace, his children are certainly the best-behaved little creatures. Now run into the garden, girls ; for I know you want to have a chat by yourselves, and cook is waiting for her orders. What do you think, Marjory ?—Nellie has taken to going into the kitchen every morning, to see the joints weighed and the pastry made. I tell Eustace she means to be a notable little house-keeper.'

'Are you so very happy, Nellie ?' asked Marjory, when she found herself alone with her friend.

'Oh yes, indeed I am !' returned Nellie, without a moment's hesitation. 'Eustace is so good and kind—mamma is devoted to him. I think I am the happiest girl in the world !'

'Oh, Nellie !'

'Oh, Nellie, indeed ! What may that mean, Miss Grave-face ?'

'Don't be vexed with me, dear—but I do not think him half good enough for you. You must let me say it, Nellie, because I am so fond of you, and we have always been such friends.'

'Oh, but you do not know him, Marjory,' replied Nellie, with the innocent faith of a girl

who feels herself honestly in love. 'No one is perfect in this world. I am very faulty myself, though I cannot get Eustace to believe it. It is very nice of him, of course, to say such things,' went on Nellie, with delicious inconsequence. 'But there are no angels nowadays ; and saints, especially mediæval ones, were so very peculiar—do you not think so ? And, on the whole, I like people to have some faults.'

'After that, it is useless for me to say anything,' returned Marjory, with a pitying shrug. 'Seeing is believing ; but I never would have believed that you were quite so far gone—Mr. Brooks too !'

This was not quite polite of Marjory, but Nellie was too delightfully self-absorbed to notice the innuendo.

'I thought once that he was taking a fancy to you, Marjory,' she went on, quite happily. 'He certainly admired you at one time, until you said that about Popples, you know.'

'Oh dear no—nothing of the kind,' answered Marjory rather hastily.

'I spoke to Eustace about it one day, and he said—you will not mind my repeating his words, Marjory ?—that though he thought you a hand-

some girl, and very amusing when you chose, he soon saw that you and he would never pull together. He liked a girl to be softer and more feminine ; but you did not even seem to care for children. He would not believe me when I told him that you were only teasing him about Popples. If Eustace has a fault, it is that he does not see a joke easily.'

'But I was in earnest—quite in earnest, Nellie. I was tired to death of Popples.'

'Oh no ; it was only your joke,' returned Nellie, in flat contradiction. 'I know how warm-hearted you really are, Marjory. I wish you were not going away just now. This new friend of yours, Miss Liliass Carr, has quite cut me out. Do you know,' dropping her voice mysteriously, 'that mamma will not hear of my being married before next spring ? I shall be one-and-twenty then, but Eustace declares he will not wait a day after September. I expect he will talk her over. And if dear little Ada is delicate, as he says, I think it will be my duty to marry him as soon as possible.'

Marjory wisely kept her thoughts to herself. She knew Mr. Brooks's mild obstinacy, and was sure he would manipulate Ada's slight delicacy

skilfully to suit his own ends. Mrs. Walford was like wax in masculine hands, and Nellie's affectionate little heart was equally plastic. Marjory was convinced in her own mind that Nellie would be mistress of Brooklyn long before September. The Walfords, mother and daughter, had certainly found their master in the handsome widower. Marjory spent the greater part of the morning at Parkside. She had just said good-bye to her friend, and was walking down the pantiles under the leafy shade of the limes, when she came upon Mr. Brooks, just turning out of his own gates.

He looked well-dressed and self-possessed as usual. He seemed a little surprised at seeing Marjory, but she stopped and frankly accosted him.

'I have been spending the morning with Nellie,' she said, giving him her hand with a more friendly smile than usual. 'Of course, I have heard the grand news. I need not tell you how heartily I think you are to be congratulated, Mr. Brooks.'

'Thanks,' he replied with masculine brevity, but he was evidently gratified by her warmth of manner, for he turned and walked with her

a few steps. 'I think myself very fortunate, Miss Deane, I assure you. Nellie is exquisitely feminine ; she takes after Mrs. Walford in that. I have never met two more charming women.'

'Nellie is the dearest little creature in the world. Forgive me if I am rude, Mr. Brooks, but I don't know anyone good enough for her.'

'You are right there,' he returned, evidently with real feeling. 'I shall do my best to make her happy.' And then he shook hands with Marjory, and left her.

'She is improving him already,' was Marjory's opinion. 'He is not half so conceited as he was. I expect he has really fallen in love with her. I dare say he will make her a good husband. Nellie will not expect too much ; she has no mental ambitions. I expect he will easily satisfy her.'

'I never knew Miss Deane had so much heart,' thought Mr. Brooks, as he hurried on to Parkside. He was one of those generous lovers who lavish gifts on the object of his affection. He had some of his wife's trinkets with him—some turquoise and pearl ornaments that he thought would match his *fiancée's* blue eyes. 'She

was certainly very nice in her manner this morning, but she has fallen off in her looks. I wonder that I could ever have thought her handsome—her face is so heavy.'

Marjory retailed the history of her morning with much humour at the luncheon-table. She took off Mrs. Walford and Mr. Brooks to the life. Anne laughed at the girl's racy description. She thought Marjory was more cheerful and like herself to-day. She had no idea that the girl was trying to hoodwink them—that her liveliness and satire were pure recklessness.

She carried off Anne after luncheon for a round of visits, beginning with the Vicarage and Mrs. Curwin, until Anne pleaded weariness, and refused to enter another house. Her sprightliness lasted all the evening. She rattled off all her most brilliant pieces, one after another, without a moment's intermission, until Mr. Frere closed the pianoforte and shook his head at her; and then she suddenly discovered that she was tired, and went to bed.

The next morning there was shopping in Moorbridge, and packing that went on late into the afternoon. As they sat over their five-o'clock tea, Anne declared that she had never been so

tired in her life. She was sure Marjory was quite knocked up too, she looked so pale; but the girl indignantly scouted this idea.

‘What nonsense, Anne!’ she said, a little petulantly. ‘What should tire me? — just putting those things into the boxes? I am going for a stroll now; it is such a lovely evening. Lie down and rest yourself.’

And then she gave Anne one of her hearty kisses, and went out.

Marjory was longing for a solitary hour with her own thoughts. As she paced under the limes, the freshness and coolness of the spring evening seemed to lull her restlessness. Life’s fitful fever seemed to hush itself under the sweet peacefulness of the hour, under ‘the quiet breadths of evening sky.’

But this tranquil mood was of short duration. A moment after she had turned aside from the main road, Fluff came fussily to her feet, and Fluff’s master sauntered round the corner.

Marjory’s eyes were fixed on the ground, or she would have seen him crossing the churchyard. He had a full view of her before Fluff’s joyous barking had roused her. The slow walk, the sad, thoughtful face, the joyless abstraction

of manner, had all been visible to him; but he apparently took no notice of the girl's trembling lip and the startled discomposure with which she greeted him.

'I did not see you,' she stammered. 'I thought you and Fluff were at Moorbridge.'

'I was paying a visit at the Vicarage. Mr. Curwin sent me a note this afternoon. There is to be a vestry-meeting or some such nuisance to-morrow. Are you going towards Pemberton, Marjory? I suppose your humble servant may accompany you? You and I have not had a walk together since you lectured me on the East Hill.'

'I do not remember,' she answered vaguely. 'Oh yes, you may come! If I said I did not want you, you would come all the same. I have learned that by this time.'

'Are men like that?' he asked, with a peculiar smile. 'Perhaps my will has only been asleep all these years, or I have been too lazy to assert it. I was a terrible fellow for having my own way once. Anne will tell you that.'

'I think you continue to have your own way now,' she returned demurely. 'You have an easy manner, but one must not judge from the

surface. I did not want you to come to St. Kilda's; I thought it would look strange to my friends. I think so still; but, of course, you will come.'

'Oh yes, I shall come,' he answered lazily.

'There!' she continued, with a sudden flash at him, and he could see she was annoyed at his persistence; 'you will have your own way in spite of my feelings. Mr. Frere, I do not like to be treated like a child—to be followed and watched for my own good. I want to be free.'

'How long have you been afraid of me?' he asked suddenly, looking her full in the face. 'Look here, Marjory Daw; I will make a compact with you. Tell me what troubles you, what has brought you home to us an altered creature, and I will promise not to come to St. Kilda's.'

He must have seen by her suddenly paling face how his words moved her; but the next moment she seemed to recover herself by a violent effort.

'Well, Marjory?' very persuasively.

'I do not know what you mean,' she faltered, trying to hurry on; but he kept step with her.

'It is not like you to fancy things, Mr. Frere. I am quite well—quite myself.'

'There is nothing the matter with your health, my dear,' he returned quietly; 'Providence has endowed you with a splendid physique; nevertheless, you are not yourself, Marjory. Something is troubling you, robbing your young sleep of its sweetness, and dimming the brightness of your spirits. If you will not confide in me—if I have lost your complete confidence—at least, let Anne share it. For both our sakes, Marjory, do not leave us like this to-morrow.'

He had never spoken to her so before—some emotion was deepening his voice. As he pleaded with her, the old carelessness, the assumed coolness, had wholly disappeared: he was making her feel for the first time the power of his concentrated purpose and will, though she was as yet ignorant what that purpose might be. She had never felt afraid of him before. All the years spent under his roof had never shown him as a man to be feared as well as loved; but now she shrank from him with new timidity. As she heard his voice, she hardly ventured to raise her eyes.

‘I do not know what you mean,’ she said, and her lip quivered like a child’s; ‘Anne does not talk to me in this way. I have nothing to tell either of you.’

‘You have nothing that you [wish to tell. Ah, Marjory Daw, you remind me of the days when you were a little child—when you ransacked the drawers of my writing-table for red sealing-wax, and could not be made to acknowledge your theft or give up the spoils. “It isn’t F’ere’s, it is mine;” that is what you kept saying. “I dot it, and it is Marjy Doo’s.” And, sure enough, there it was hidden snugly in the folds of your frock. “Mine, mine!—not F’ere’s!” was the burthen of your cry. I remember Anne cried as she punished you; and then you cried, too.’

The old humorous voice, with a break of pathos in it, was too much for Marjory. They were standing by the low wooden bench where she had sat that March day; and now she suddenly sank down upon it, and covered her face with her hands, and he could see the slow tears trickling through her fingers.

‘Oh that I were that little child again!’ he heard her say.

‘Tell me what troubles you, darling,’ he said, bending over and speaking in so low a voice that she lost the last word; but if she had seen his face, surely the veil must have dropped from her eyes.

‘Yes, I will tell you!’ she returned, with sudden vehemence, and dashing the tears away. ‘I will tell you—but not now. When the time comes for me to speak, you will not need to ask me. I will come to you of my own accord—I owe you at least as much as that.’

‘You owe me nothing, Marjory.’

‘Everything—everything—to you and Anne.’ Then, recovering herself: ‘If you come to St. Kilda—I cannot prevent you; for another year, I suppose—you can claim some sort of right to control my actions.’

‘You may be assured that I shall claim any rights that belong to me,’ he continued gravely. ‘But there is one thing I cannot bear: that you should endure trouble alone, and that I should not share it.’

‘You could not carry my burthens,’ she said, with a faint smile. ‘We came alone into the world, and we must die alone—“Each in its hidden sphere of joy and woe.”’

Do you not remember what Keble says, Mr. Frere ?’

‘When you women quote Keble, I always give up the ghost of my argument,’ he said, striving with a great effort to resume his old manner. ‘Some change is coming over me, Marjory ; my hermit spirit positively refuses to dwell alone any longer.’

‘We should not like our nearest and dearest to read all our thoughts,’ she answered, with an involuntary shudder ; ‘supposing we were to find Hades peopled with our past thoughts, Mr. Frere—that the shadowy troops of the dead and gone things for whose birth we are responsible, were to haunt us there !’

‘A horrible suggestion, one that gives me all sorts of creepy feelings ; how can you talk so, dear, with the spring sunset shining full in your face ?’

‘Let us walk towards it then, and forget everything gloomy,’ she returned gently, giving him her hand. He held it for a moment, and then pressed it kindly and let it fall ; and then they walked on in silence. Both their hearts were full ; but only the man knew that he had betrayed himself to unseeing eyes, and told his

secret to deaf ears. Marjory herself was too self-absorbed to grasp the truth that lay so near her, only all that evening her manner was so gentle to him, and so affectionate, that Anne noticed it. She thought Marjory seemed very fond of Capel, and wondered that her brother was so grave and quiet. There was only one jarring word spoken throughout the evening. Anne, who was busy with sundry small preparations for Marjory's departure the following morning, suddenly asked her brother if he intended accompanying Marjory to London. 'Of course,' he answered curtly; 'I shall go to St. Pancras, and leave Marjory in Mrs. Carr's hands.' His tone was unusually sharp and decided; but as he spoke, he involuntarily looked across the room at the girl. She did not speak; but he could see by the turn of her long neck, and the rising colour, that this resolution did not please her, but for once Marjory held her peace.

He was very quiet with her the next day. They travelled together almost in silence. He was thoughtful for her comfort, and seemed to anticipate her wishes; but his gravity was so unbroken that Marjory looked at him wistfully now and then, fearing that she had hurt him.

As they were driving towards St. Pancras, she could not refrain from putting the question to him. 'Have I made you angry with me, Mr. Frere?' she asked timidly; 'are you displeased with me in any way?' but she was almost sorry that she had spoken, he looked at her in such evident surprise.

'Have I ever been angry with you in your life?' he said, smiling; 'why, Marjory, what absurd idea is this?'

'You are so different,' she faltered; 'you are not like yourself at all.'

He seemed to revolve this speech in his mind as he looked out of the cab window.

'How can you expect me to be like myself?' he returned reproachfully; 'you have turned my world topsy-turvy. It is only just ten, and I breakfasted three hours ago; if Joshua found his long day as unsatisfactory as I shall find mine, he was to be pitied.'

'I asked you not to do it,' she replied, laughing at this. 'Would not an afternoon's nap make up for the rest of which I have deprived you?'

'Come, that is not a bad idea; I will consider that proposition of yours. Here we are at St.

Pancras ; and there is your friend Miss Carr looking out for you.'

'You are late, Marjory,' exclaimed Liliás, coming forward to meet them. 'Mother and Barry are already in the carriage ; we have seats in the drawing-room car. Fleming will see to the luggage, Mr. Frere. Please come and let me introduce you to my mother.'

'Come, Marjory,' he said—for she seemed inclined to linger—'our train from Moorbridge must have been late ; we have timed it too finely. I shall only just have a moment to shake hands with Mrs. Carr and say good-bye to you.'

But he found time for something else ; for, after chatting cheerfully for a few minutes to Mrs. Carr and Barry, and making sundry arrangements for their comfort, he drew Marjory to the door of the saloon.

'Marjory, will you promise to write to me if you want my help in any way ?'

'Most certainly I will promise you that,' she answered gratefully.

'You were right,' he continued a little absently ; 'Mrs. Carr is a beautiful woman. A most uncommon type of face. You are not unlike her,

Marjory, though I cannot flatter you by saying that you can quite come up to her.'

'No, indeed!' she answered hurriedly; but he was surprised to see how she flushed at his words. 'But they are signalling for the train to move; you must go, Mr. Frere—indeed you must.'

'No hurry,' he returned, in a leisurely tone. 'I do not intend to go to St. Kilda's for the next two or three weeks. Well, good-bye; take care of yourself, my—Marjory Doo.'

She smiled at him, and moved away; but he still stood on the platform, watching her as she walked slowly up the long saloon until she joined her friends.

'What a pleasant-looking man Mr. Frere is,' observed Mrs. Carr; 'he has such a nice clever face. He is no relation of yours, really, Marjory?'

'No; he is only Anne's brother,' she returned simply. She was looking at him, trying to imagine how he appeared in other people's eyes—to strangers who had never seen him before. They must think him distinguished-looking, but a little odd, she thought, with his silver hair and keen, brown face; not young, but certainly not old; he seemed younger somehow than he used.

Marjory was so lost in these innocent reflec-

tions that Mrs. Carr's questioning glance did not reach her ; but she would have made nothing of that lady's smile as she stooped to gather up some wraps for Barry. But Liliás caught it, and smiled too. Both the women thought that they were tracing the beginning of a romance.

'Of course he does, and she has not found it out,' Mrs. Carr's amused eyes seemed to say. 'She will find it out soon, and then how will it be with her?' Liliás said to herself. But she blushed a little over her wise thoughts ; for she, too, had a budding romance in her life.





CHAPTER VIII.

MARJORY IS INTRODUCED TO COSY NOOK.

‘**M**Y dear, I am afraid you are very tired,’ observed Mrs. Carr, in a motherly tone of solicitude, as they drew near the journey’s end.

‘No, indeed; I am only stupid,’ answered Marjory, rousing herself with difficulty from her abstraction. For the last hour she had hardly spoken, but sat with her eyes fixed on the flying landscape, listening to her companions’ conversation, but not joining in it. ‘Poor Mr. Barry is far more tired than I.’

‘Mother, is it not absurd for Marjory to be so formal with Barry—and he is only a boy?’ asked Lillas, whose spirits seemed to rise with every milestone they passed. The blue veil she had tied round her hat showed up the golden tints of her fair hair and delicate complexion.

Her bright, varying smiles, her merry speeches, were evidently sources of enjoyment to Mrs. Carr, her eyes rested upon her so fondly.

‘You are right there, Lil,’ observed Barry suddenly, unclosing his tired eyes. The journey was a martyrdom to the poor fellow, though he tried to hide the fact as well as he could. ‘Miss Deane is horribly formal.’

‘I will call you Barry if you will call me Marjory,’ said the girl, with quick impulse. Her manner surprised them all a little; it was so agitated. But Mrs. Carr said, in her usual quiet voice :

‘Well, my dear, why should it not be so? Barry feels quite at home with you, though he does not generally care for young ladies’ society; but we are all such good friends that we need not trouble ourselves with formalities.’

‘I should like it very much,’ returned Marjory, in a low voice.

‘All right,’ replied Barry good-humouredly. ‘It will be good fun making Lil jealous by asking you to do all sorts of things for me. The only difficulty is, if I get too much used to you, I shall scold you as I do the others.’

‘I shall not mind that,’ she answered, with

an affectionate smile at him; but a moment afterwards she had turned away, fearing that she had betrayed too much interest in him. 'Her brother — hers!' she said under her breath. Poor boy! how she was learning to love him!

Barry himself wondered with grateful humility why this girl, a stranger to them all, took such interest in him. 'She was so kind,' he thought. 'Perhaps it was her nature to be kind to everyone; but even Liliás could not be more gentle.'

'I suppose Hurrell will be at the station,' he observed by-and-by, with a mischievous glance at Liliás.

'I am sure I don't know if he will be there,' she answered, with assumed carelessness. 'Mother, how glad I am to be at home with you again! There is no place like home, after all!'

'No, darling; we always agree in that. I wish, for the sake of poor Barry, that we had a station at St. Kilda's. The long drive from Wharton will tire him still more.'

'Never mind, mother; it cannot be helped,' returned the boy, a little irritably.

His nerves were jarred by weariness and pain, but the next moment he brightened up.

‘There’s Hurrell, large as life; and Lassie is with him! Are they not a fine pair, Miss Deane—Marjory, I mean?’

Marjory looked as she was bidden. The train was just slackening speed, and on the platform she saw a tall, powerfully-built young man, in a brown velveteen coat, with a brown moustache. Marjory did not think him handsome then or afterwards, but she never saw a face that, on nearer inspection, pleased her better; it was so frank and honest. The dark eyes had such a kindly gleam in them; there was such a mixture of gentleness and strength, such an air of *bonhomie* about him—that untranslatable word. The handsome collie that stood beside him was evidently a favourite with the whole party, for as Mr. Wentworth opened the door she sprang in, and began licking Barry’s hands and fawning on him after the manner of dumb beasts.

‘Lassie is glad to get you back,’ he said pleasantly, looking at Lili as he spoke; but his face plainly said that Lassie’s master was glad too.

Marjory noticed the half-shy, half-pleased blush that answered his look. Evidently it contented him, for he turned to Mrs. Carr and gave her his attention.

‘We must introduce you to Miss Deane, Hurrell,’ she observed, when they were all on the platform together. ‘She and my Lillas are great friends.’

‘I am sure we need no other introduction, Miss Deane,’ he returned, shaking hands with her in the most friendly manner; but Marjory noticed he scanned her closely for a moment. ‘Now, Mrs. Carr, I know what you wish. Fleming and I will help Barry into the barouche, if you and Lillas will wait a moment. My dog-cart is here, so there is plenty of room. You will let me drive you, Lillas, will you not?’

‘Oh yes!’ she answered quite simply, as though the request were not a novel one.

She stood quietly aside until Barry was carefully lifted into the carriage and Mrs. Carr and Marjory had taken their places; and then Mr. Wentworth turned to her with a smile, and gave her his hand to assist her into the dog-cart.

Marjory watched them with all a girl’s curi-

osity. Liliass was not engaged—she knew that, for she wore no ring of betrothal; and yet the look of quiet understanding that passed between them—the simple, almost unconscious reception of Mr. Wentworth's attention, spoke of a large amount of friendship. Marjory looked after them until the dog-cart, with its high-stepping mare, had disappeared from her view, and then she turned and met Mrs. Carr's smile.

‘I see what you are thinking,’ she said, bending forward a little. ‘You are wondering how things stand between those two. No, they are not engaged; but it is all Liliass's fault. Poor Hurrell has much to bear.’

Marjory looked significantly at Barry, who was leaning back on the cushions with closed eyes and forehead wrinkled with weariness and pain. Mrs. Carr understood her glance at once.

‘Oh, we have no secrets, we three—have we, Barry?—and Hurrell takes us each in confidence by turns, so we know all about it. He is far too good and patient, I tell him. Few young men would act as he does. I think if anyone is worthy of my child, it is Hurrell Wentworth. His mother and I are dear friends, and she is so fond of Liliass.’

'She has told me a little about them. Of course, I saw there was something, but I hardly understood. She seems to like him, but yet——'

Marjory stopped. A glimmer of the real truth of the case began to dawn on her.

'Hurrell may be sure of one thing,' returned Mrs. Carr, in a tone of quiet conviction—'that Liliass will never marry anyone else. But, unfortunately, he has a dangerous rival in her mother. She cannot make up her mind to leave Mavisbank for Redlands.'

'That is what I thought,' answered Marjory, in a low voice. 'You are Liliass's great absorbing passion. It seems to me, even with my slight knowledge of her, that she will find it difficult to make room for anyone else.'

'Oh, Hurrell has now a good share of her affections. Of course, he knows how things are between us; he is ready to make large allowance. Anyone else, I tell her, would insist on a monopoly; but Hurrell says he will never try to separate us.'

'There are few like that, I should think,' returned Marjory, with intuitive shrewdness.

‘Most men are so selfish ; they must have all or none.’

By a curious revolution of thought, her mind turned to Mr. Frere. ‘Was he not like that ? Could anyone be more unselfish than he ?’ A speech of his had haunted her ever since that sad talk of theirs. ‘“ There is one thing I cannot bear ”—was not that what he had said ? and how troubled his voice had been !—“ there is one thing I cannot bear, that you should endure trouble alone, and that I should not share it.” What girl had a friend like that ?’ she thought proudly ; and there was no envy in her heart that other girls—Nellie and Liliás—had their lovers, and she had none.

‘Liliás’s husband will never have all while I am alive,’ was Mrs. Carr’s reply to this. And there was a mixture of pride and tenderness in her voice. ‘I was an only daughter, Marjory ; but I left my mother—it seems to me far too willingly—for my husband. With Liliás and myself there will never be any real separation. Redlands is so near, we should meet every day.’

‘She will grow more reconciled to the idea by-and-by,’ returned Marjory a little absently. The subject had almost a painful interest for

her, but just now her thoughts would concentrate themselves on her own strange story. She was about to enter her rightful home—as a guest—for the first time in her life, she would sleep under her mother's roof. No wonder her attention wandered as her eyes strayed over the hedgerows and fields to the line of dark blue hills.

Mrs. Carr thought the scenery was absorbing her.

‘This is not a very pretty road,’ she said, arresting Marjory’s flagging attention, ‘although it is very beautiful all round Thorpe and St. Theobald’s; but St. Kilda’s itself is bleak and unprepossessing. We shall not even pass through our one main street, and you will not see the church and Vicarage. Now, my dear, look, there are the ruins of our celebrated Castle; and there, up among those dark woods, is Mavisbank.’

Marjory threw a quick searching glance round her. She could see the roofs of St. Kilda’s, and the green hill with broken castellated walls and ruined arches, with ivy clinging about them; and just before them a lonely white house standing high in conspicuous isolation, with a

dark background of woods, and all round them the purple hills with the spring sunset above them.

A steep road led to Mavisbank, but the horses were evidently well used to it. Mrs. Carr chatted on cheerfully as the carriage-springs jolted over the rough stones.

‘You will be surprised at the total absence of flower-garden,’ she observed; ‘but our climate is so bleak, and the house stands so high, that our favourite flowers would never bloom there, and Liliás and I are too fond of them to see them blighted by our cold winds. But we have built a conservatory—or rather our glass drawing-room, as we call it—and there Liliás can work among them to her heart’s content. It was a great expense, but I could not deny myself the gratification of giving her such pleasure.’

‘She has told me about it,’ was Marjory’s low reply.

Liliás had often described to her that wonderful birthday-gift.

Mrs. Carr’s attention just now was engrossed by her son, who was evidently enduring great suffering from the jolting. And so Marjory was

left to herself for a little, and in a few minutes an abrupt turn in the road brought them to Mavisbank.

The gate stood wide open, and the empty dog-cart was before the door. A smooth, green lawn, with a belt of evergreens, was in front, and a wide carriage-drive brought them to the portico. The heavy oak door, thickly studded with nails, was thrown back, and Liliás and Mr. Wentworth were on the threshold waiting for them.

‘Welcome to Mavisbank, Marjory,’ she said, running out to meet her friend and bring her in. ‘Now, dear, is this not pleasant and homelike?’

Marjory started with a little natural surprise. She had expected to find herself in an ordinary hall or passage, but, on crossing the threshold, she found herself at once in a sitting-room; at least, the fine old hall, with its oak panelling, had evidently been transformed into one.

This noble room ran from front to back of the house, and, as Marjory afterwards discovered, occupied one entire wing, and was half living-room and half library. - One side was fitted up with bookcases from the ceiling to the floor. A

large bay circular window, with a circular cushioned seat, looked over the back lawn. A round table stood in the centre of the hall. Heavily carved oak chairs, with lounges and couches of every description, filled up the space round the grand old fireplace. Some pine knots had just been flung on the bright coal fire, and merrily spluttered as the sparks flew up the chimney. A little square tea-table stood in one corner, and the china and silver gleamed in the ruddy light.

‘Mother, mother, does not Cosy Nook look delicious!’ cried Liliias, looking delightedly round her. ‘Do you know, Marjory, I always call this hall Cosy Nook. We never sit anywhere else of an evening—do we, mother? There is my piano, and that is Barry’s special couch; and this is mother’s chair, and her little work-table and davenport; and these are my private belongings,’ pointing to similar articles of furniture on the opposite side. ‘Look how nicely that screen shuts off the staircase and passage, and keeps out all draughts. Don’t be shocked, Marjory, when I tell you we have no drawing-room—mother and I abhor the word—no boudoir, no morning-room, no private sitting-room at all.

There is only the dining-room, rather a small dull apartment, and Barry's room, when he wants to study and be disagreeable—I call all hermits disagreeable—and my dear conservatory. The rest are just kitchens and offices.'

'Oh, Lillas, you chatterbox! do be quiet a moment, and let Marjory take in her new surroundings!' exclaimed Mrs. Carr, who had seated herself tranquilly in one of the high-backed chairs by the fire. Mr. Wentworth had gone off with Fleming to assist Barry to his own room, for he wished to retire at once; and the three ladies were left alone.

'Now, mother,' persisted Lillas, 'how am I to keep quiet? I am just ready to sing with joy at being at home again. Marjory, why will you stand at that window, when I want to show you the conservatory before it is dark?'

'One moment,' pleaded Marjory. She was standing in the bay, looking out as though fascinated by the unexpected view. There was no garden at all. A narrow gravel walk ran under the windows, and beyond, a smooth expanse of turf, like a miniature field, only without fences of any kind, led into the woods. Absolutely nothing before her eyes except this

lawn, and dark hanging woods that seemed to climb up the hillside.

‘Well, Marjory,’ coming to her side, ‘what do you think of the Mavis woods? Is not that better than a conventional park or flower garden?’

‘It is beautiful, but it is a little gloomy too,’ returned Marjory doubtfully. ‘On a summer afternoon, I can imagine no prospect more beautiful than those woods. It must be delightful just to put on one’s hat and stroll across the grass, and find a cool shady nook under those trees.’

‘Well?’ interrogatively; ‘and what objection lies behind that grudging speech of yours?’

‘It is just this,’ returned Marjory. ‘In spring and summer, there can be nothing more beautiful; but in autumnal twilight or winter nights, I can fancy how dark and gloomy those woods must look. If I lived here,’ with a slight shudder, ‘I am sure I should conjure up weird shapes gliding out from between the trees, and coming over the grass to press shadowy faces against this window.’

Lilias laughed merrily.

‘Oh, my dear, what an imagination you

have ! I am sure you could write a collection of horrible ghost-stories. I must ask Hurrell to tell you some. Oh, of course, it is deliciously gloomy here, especially on wet October evenings. There is nothing I like better than to stand here and watch the drip, drip of the rain on the sodden grass, or to listen to the branches crackling and waving in a strong wind ; and just as I begin to feel nice and creepy, as the children say, to turn round and see Cosy Nook, with mother sitting at her little tea-table, and Barry dozing, and the bright firelight leaping in every corner of the dear old hall.'

'Well, Liliias, after that description, I certainly think you possess a vivid imagination yourself.'

'You are quite right, Miss Deane,' observed Mr. Wentworth, who had drawn near the girls unobserved. 'Miss Carr is horribly superstitious. She quite believes old wives' stories about apparitions. The boggle, the swath—or swarf, as they call it in Northumberland—or the wraith, or wauf, or fetch, or whatever you like to name it, is quite a creed with her. She will tell you quite seriously—

“ ‘A boggle’s been seen wi’ twae heeds,
(Lord, help us!) ayont Wullycar’us,
Wi’ twae saucer-een and a tail;
They du say it’s auld Jobby Barras.’ ”

‘Hurrell!’ remonstrated Liliass; but her pout was lost in the gathering twilight. But nevertheless she whispered to Marjory: ‘I will get him to tell you one of his nonsensical tales as we have our tea—it is too late to see the conservatory to-night—and he talks the dialect so well.’

‘Come, Liliass!’ exclaimed Mrs. Carr at this point, ‘I am waiting to give you and Marjory some tea; and then you must take her upstairs, and show her her room.’

‘Miss Deane,’ observed Mr. Wentworth, as he handed her her cup, and then helped himself, ‘of course our good friends here have told you Mavisbank is haunted?’

‘Now, Hurrell,’ interrupted Mrs. Carr, smiling, ‘I will not have any nonsense put into our young guest’s head. It is nothing of the kind, Marjory.’

‘How about that man of dark complexion that was seen to glide down the wood-path, and towards the house, and then silently disap-

peared ?' commenced Mr. Wentworth, in rather a hollow voice.

But as Mrs. Carr shook her head, and pretended to frown, he changed his tone to a more sprightly one, and asked Marjory in a comical manner if she had ever heard of a boggle-de-boo.

'No, indeed,' returned Marjory, much amused; 'but I suppose it is a sort of ghost.'

'I am rather learned on the subject, as Miss Carr will tell you; so I can inform you that boggle-de-boo may be translated as "the spirit of fear." We all have our private boggles, Miss Deane—our skeleton in the cupboard, as you may term it. A clergyman once gave a good illustration of "bo." And by-the-bye, I may as well inform you that he mentioned that Boa is the name of the principal divinity of the northern people (Tungusians and Ostiak)—I hope you ladies will not find my learning too overpowering.'

Mrs. Carr smiled at him benevolently, and Liliás whispered wickedly :

'He is going to be ridiculous—he always begins like that.' Then aloud : 'Well, Hurrell, what about this mysterious "bo" ?'

‘Once upon a time,’ began Hurrell solemnly, ‘at a place lying to the north-east of Kendal, a man and his son were breaking-in a mare. “Do you think, noo,” said the lad to his father, “et meyar ill nit boggle?” “Neyah,” said the old man, “she’ll boggle nin, nit she; but we can try her. Gang thee thee ways, and git ahint a yat—stoop, en I’ll git on t’ meyar, en ride her through t’ gap-stead; en just as I’s gangin’ til’t, rear thee oot, and shout ‘Bo!’ en if she stands that, she’ll stand out.” The lad did as he was told, and the old man rode the mare very quietly towards the gateway. When he had approached within a few yards, out popped the lad, with his dirty cap over his head, and shouted “Bo!” Away went the mare across the field, and down fell the old man with a “soss” (happily not much worse for his tumble). “Ods, wile licht o’ thee, thoo lile varmint!” said he; “thoo boes with neyah judgment at a’—thoo mud ha kilt thee fadder.”’

It was impossible not to laugh at Marjory’s mystified face; she evidently comprehended nothing, but Lillas clapped her hands applaudingly.

‘I call that deliciously ridiculous, but of

course it is not original. Marjory, Hurrell will have to give you lessons in the dialect, or you will not comprehend the raciness of his anecdotes. You see, my dear, the moral of the tale is, that we must always use judgment when we want to test people or things; as the old man remarked, "thoo boes with neyah judgment at a'."

'Never mind, Miss Deane,' returned Mr. Wentworth; 'my mother is the person to enlighten your mind on all sorts of curious customs and superstitions prevalent in these parts, not so very long ago. She will tell you all about Carling Sunday, and Martingale Cherry Sunday, and Longthwaite Plum Sunday, and the Kurn-winning, and All Hallow E'en, and "the first of May, that is shaking-bottle day."' "

'Now, Hurrell,' observed Mrs. Carr seriously, 'I do protest against all this talk to-night. Liliass, you are very naughty to encourage him, but I think you are just "fey" this evening, and there is no stemming the tide of your nonsense; Marjory is beginning to look quite tired.'

Liliass rose at once, but to Marjory's surprise she turned suddenly grave.

‘Mother darling, I wish you had not used that word.’

‘What word, dearest.’

‘“Fey,”—you know what it means: people are fey when they are in their highest wildest spirits, just before something happens; I have read that in some book.’

‘Why, Liliass,’ half chidingly, ‘how absurd!’ but Mr. Wentworth interrupted her.

‘What did I tell you?’ he returned, looking at Marjory with much solemnity; ‘after that, I suppose you will allow somebody is superstitious with a vengeance. I think I shall have to tell my tale over again, Liliass, as you certainly have not taken my lesson—“thoo boes with neyah judgment at a’;”’ at which ridiculous climax Liliass’s gravity disappeared, and her dimples came into play.

‘Come, Marjory,’ she said, linking her arm in her friend’s, ‘we will leave those two to entertain each other.’ But directly they were behind the screen, and in a short passage that seemed lit by some distant glimmer, she said in a low voice: ‘I am afraid I am superstitious, in spite of my disbelief in boggles or bogies of any kind. And mother and Hurrell often laugh at me, but I

do hate that word "fey;" it always makes me shiver, and I think I have felt happier than usual to-night.'

'Dear Liliass,' returned Marjory, with some emotion, 'I hope you will always be happy; no one more deserves to be.'

'Thanks, dear,' she replied, wondering a little why Marjory's voice shook so. 'Now, look here—this is the dining-room; it is rather small and dull in the daytime, but just now, with a bright fire, and those white china lamps, it looks snug enough. Barry's sitting-room, or study, as the poor boy calls it, leads out of it. The door is hidden by that Chinese screen; we have screens in nearly every room, because of the draughts in winter. Now, Marjory, just peep in my dear conservatory; it is not large, but so pretty, and in this faint light it is really quite picturesque.'

She opened a glass-door as she spoke, at the end of the narrow passage, and Marjory immediately felt a rush of scented warm air. The uncertain light just penetrated through the glass roof and showed her dark climbing plants round slender pillars, and a background of colourless flowers. There was a soft trickle of a

miniature fountain, and she could see bamboo-seats and a little round table.

‘Mother sits here sometimes in the winter, when I am hard at work among the ferns and plants. It is so warm, and light, and pleasant. When I have much to do, Hurrel often comes over to help me.’

‘Mr. Wentworth seems very nice and amusing,’ hazarded Marjory, feeling she was treading on delicate ground.

‘Oh yes, he is amusing enough sometimes,’ answered Lilius without a moment’s hesitation. ‘He is so glad to get us back that he is in capital spirits to-night. You must go over with me to-morrow to see his mother. She would never forgive me if I missed a day on first coming home. She is nice too, and I am sure you will say so; but she is rather old-fashioned, and just a little prim and precise. ‘It is funny, but some married people are rather old-maidish.’

They had reached the top of the staircase by this time, and Lilius interrupted herself to point out the different rooms as they passed them.

‘That is Barry’s room, and Fleming sleeps in the dressing-room; this is mother’s, and mine

is next to it—we have a door of communication between our rooms. Yours is just opposite, across the passage. I would not let mother put you into the big spare room. This is so much cosier, and you are nearer us both.'

'It was kind of you to think of that,' returned Marjory gratefully, as they entered the pleasant room, rosy with firelight. It was certainly not large, but was furnished very prettily: a low couch stood by the fire on one side, and an easy-chair and table on the other; cretonne curtains hung over the window. As Marjory was about to draw them aside, Lilius caught her hand.

'Undraw them when the morning comes,' she said, with a little laugh. 'Your window is just over the bay, and so you have the same prospect and look-out on the Mavis woods. It is a little gloomy at night, as you say, and especially mysterious when the moon sets behind the wood, and all sorts of shadows seem to hide among the trees. Now, Marjory, we have wasted so much time in Cosy Nook—I always do, you know—that we shall have barely time to dress for supper; it is too late to call it dinner. I will send Emma to help you;

you will find her very useful. Ellis always waits on us. Now, good-bye for the present. I dare say you are tired to death of my chattering.' And with a hasty kiss Liliás ran out of the room.





CHAPTER IX.

THE SEAT IN THE WOOD.

A CURIOUS feeling came over Marjory as Liliias closed the door—a sudden weariness and sensation of giddiness.

She had sustained her part well since her entrance into the house more than an hour ago—had talked and laughed with the others without much conscious effort—but all at once her strength seemed to forsake her.

When Emma, the rosy-cheeked housemaid, came to volunteer her services, she found Miss Deane kneeling beside her trunk, with a face as colourless as her own apron, as she informed the housekeeper afterwards, and complaining of giddiness.

‘If I were you, miss,’ observed Emma good-naturedly, ‘I would just put myself on that

sofa, and leave me to do the unpacking. It is the long journey—it often turns folks giddy unless they are used to it. I will bring you some supper and willing, miss, if you don't feel fit to go down again to-night.'

'Will they not think it strange?' asked Marjory faintly; her head was beginning to throb, and she felt as though any more exertion were impossible.

'Folks always please themselves at Mavisbank,' replied Emma, in a voice of cheerful assurance; 'I have often heard the mistress call it Liberty Hall. But there, I will ask Miss Liliass, and she will soon set your mind at rest.'

And without waiting for permission, Emma tripped away; and in a few minutes Liliass came in with a very remorseful face.

'Oh, Marjory, I am so sorry!' she began. 'It was all my foolish chatter, and making Hurrell talk so, that has tired you. Of course, you poor dear, you have had all that journey from Moorbridge, while we were comfortably breakfasting at St. Pancras Hotel; and I ought to have remembered that, and have taken you straight to your room to rest.'

‘Oh, never mind—if you will only excuse me coming down this evening,’ returned Marjory.

‘Oh, but I do mind!’ persisted Liliás. ‘Mother will scold me, and I deserve it. Now, dear, if you will take my advice, you will just go to bed, and leave Emma to do everything for you. A good night’s rest will set you up.’ And as Marjory promised to follow these injunctions faithfully, Liliás consented to leave her.

It was impossible for her to do justice to the tempting supper that Emma presently brought to her; but the glass of champagne seemed to revive her strangely. Emma, who certainly had a voluble tongue, as well as brisk, capable hands, informed her that ‘Mr. Wentworth had insisted that the mistress should send Fleming to the cellar for some champagne; and he had made Miss Liliás have some too. Miss Deane was to drink every drop—that was his message—it would soon cure her headache, and send her to sleep.’ And, to Marjory’s surprise, it certainly had this effect; for, instead of lying awake for hours, revolving all sorts of dismal thoughts, no sooner had she laid her tired head

on the lavender-scented pillows, than she fell into a sound sleep.

She did not even wake when, some two hours later, a tall figure in a grey wrapper stole softly into her room, and looked at her by the light of the dying fire ; nor did she hear the brief conversation outside her door.

‘ She is fast asleep, Liliás, and I expect will rest until morning. She was just tired out, poor child ! we must take more care of her. She looks very pretty asleep, and her hair is magnificent ; but I wonder why her face seems to remind me of some one—it is so strange when one cannot trace a resemblance.’

‘ How often you have said that, mother, since you first knew Marjory ! You will soon get as fond of her as I am. Hurrell thinks her very handsome, but not his style. I am sure she was very merry with us in Cosy Nook, and yet he will have it that she looks unhappy.’

‘ I have often thought so too. No, of course she is not Hurrell’s style—his head is too full of somebody else. Why do you blush, darling ? Poor Hurrell, I pity him from my heart ! I wonder he can care so for an ungrateful girl ; but now we are both too tired to talk any

longer. Come into my room, dearest, and we will read our chapter together.'

Marjory, who was young and healthy, woke early the next morning, feeling rested and refreshed by her long sleep. For a moment her strange surroundings puzzled her, for she had fancied herself in her own room at Murrel's End; but as full consciousness returned, she sprang from the bed and undrew the curtains, feeling the semi-darkness and closeness of the room intolerable. As she did so, a low exclamation burst from her lips.

The sun was shining; blackbirds and thrushes were hopping across the dewy lawn; the twittering of innumerable birds sounded from the woods, that no longer looked dark and gloomy in the fresh morning light. From her window she could see plainly a narrow steep path with a bench placed under the trees. She longed to find her way to it—it looked so shady and inviting. She would dress herself as quickly as possible and go out. She would have at least an hour to herself before the nine o'clock breakfast. 'I wish I could paint those spring tints,' she thought regretfully, as her eyes wandered over the hillside with its

wealth of foliage, and listened to the faint soughing as the wind rippled the myriad of leaves. 'If Nellie were here, she would sketch from morning till night. But I am no artist, as Anne says. Liliás paints—she told me so—and she used to make such pretty sketches at Whitecliffe. I wish I had not been so idle while I was young. Anne was not half strict enough with me.'

Emma's eyes grew round with surprise when she entered with the little tea-tray and can of hot water, and found Miss Deane sitting by the window, fully dressed.

'You must be rested, to be sure, miss,' she observed, with an admiring glance at Marjory's morning-dress. 'It is only just eight, and Miss Liliás is not awake yet; and Mr. Barry has had a poor night, and has gone off to sleep. Fleming says it will be a good hour or more before breakfast, so you will be glad of your tea,' placing it on a little round table at Marjory's side.

Marjory thanked her, and Emma withdrew. But when she had finished her cup of tea, she determined to obey her impulse, and find out the woodland path. There is something alluring

in wandering alone in fresh places before one's world seems fully awake. Marjory felt as though she and the birds had it all to themselves, as she crossed the wet grass and entered the wood. Mavisbank looked more picturesque from this side than from any other. One or two bay-windows had been thrown out, and the conservatory had been built, and the entire back of the house was covered with Virginian creeper. Evidently the woods sheltered it on this side, and it was less bleak and exposed than in the front.

‘It would make a lovely sketch from here,’ thought Marjory; ‘I must ask Liliass to take one for me; the front of the house is rather bare.’

And then she turned, and went slowly up the path, pausing every now and then to examine the hooded ferns that nestled at the tree-roots, or to hunt for the first tiny primroses that were beginning to show themselves. In another week or two, Liliass had told her, the woods would be covered with them; and already they were opening their pale yellow buds in sheltered nooks.

As Marjory came up to the bench, she

thought she heard the sound of knocking or hammering a little higher up. Perhaps some woodman was at work felling trees or cutting down the brushwood, which certainly grew a little too thick in some parts; and half in curiosity she tracked the sound—human labour always possessing an interest to her.

She came presently to a little dell, an open space carpeted with springy moss, with a tiny stream running through it, flowing over smooth grey boulders which checked it every now and then, forming miniature cascades and small transparent pools, with tiny glittering pebbles at the bottom. An old mossy log spanned the rivulet at one part; and on the banks, later on, hundreds of ferns would wave their cool green fronds, with broad primrose leaves growing among them, and here and there the modest wood-violet.

It was such a lovely little nook, but its silent peacefulness was already invaded. A man in a dark blue jersey was hammering noisily on a rustic seat he was evidently making. His back was turned towards Marjory, and he was singing, at the top of a fine clear voice, a curious song that she had once heard.

‘If this be vanity—hip, hip, hurrah!’ he sang. What a strange song for a woodman, or carpenter! but as this thought passed through her mind, a large liver-coloured collie, who had been curled up on his coat, suddenly sprang up with a bark, and then began to wag its tail; and as Marjory said ‘Lassie!’ in a tone of astonishment, her master turned round, with a look of confusion in his good-natured face.

‘Mr. Wentworth! I had no idea it was you; but of course I recognised Lassie. Did you sleep at Mavisbank last night, and what are you doing there?’

‘I suppose you are surprised to see me,’ he said, laughing. ‘I am sorry I cannot shake hands with you; but just look at my disreputable paws! No, I did not sleep here. I left my mare at the bottom of the hill. I hope you are more rested, Miss Deane. You are not quite such an early riser as I am; but you are out betimes.’

‘You have ridden over from Thorpe!’ she said, with a little staccato in her voice.

‘Yes; and have had two hours’ hard work besides. I am no mean carpenter, I can tell

you, Miss Deane. Don't you think I have made a tidy job of this seat ?'

'Oh yes ; it is beautiful ! And you have chosen just the right place for it. And what have you carved at the back ?'

Mr. Wentworth flushed a little as she bent over to read the inscription that he had cut out in the wood—'For Liliass,' it said ; and Marjory coloured up with quick sympathy.

'It is a surprise,' he returned, driving in a long nail as he spoke. 'We have had so much rain, or I should have finished it a week ago. You have stolen a march on me, but you must not betray me,' trying to speak carelessly.

'It is a kind thought. Liliass will be so pleased,' she answered, wishful to set him at his ease, for it was annoying for him that a stranger should come and spy upon him in this way. 'I think you have done it very cleverly, and it looks most comfortable.'

'It is finished now. Will you try it, Miss Deane ?'

But Marjory shook her head. She knew better than that.

'Liliass must be the first,' she said, smiling. 'But how tired and hungry you must be, Mr.

Wentworth ! Surely you mean to breakfast at Mavisbank ?'

'Not this morning, thank you. My mother will be waiting for me, and I am too dutiful a son to disappoint her. By-the-bye, I hear that we are to meet later on at Redlands, but that will not be until the afternoon. Mind you decoy Miss Carr here, for she has set her heart on having a seat placed in the dell, and I know she will be pleased. Now, Lassie, old girl, give me my coat and let us go in search of Bay. Can you find your way back to Mavisbank, Miss Deane, or shall I show you your bearings ?' But as Marjory smilingly declined his escort, he wished her a cordial good-bye, and shouldering his tools, strode off with Lassie at his heels, whistling as merrily as a blackbird.

'A fine manly fellow,' she said to herself. 'She is right, and he is worthy of Liliass. What trouble he must have taken ! And the inscription is so beautifully carved in Old English letters, "For Liliass." She must be hard to please indeed, if such an attention fails to touch her !'

'Marjory, Marjory !' exclaimed Liliass's voice at this minute ; and there was the girl running

to meet her, with the sunshine falling on her uncovered hair. 'Oh, you naughty child! Emma saw you go in this direction, but I never thought you would wander so far.'

'You will catch cold, Liliass! You see, I have my hat and jacket. I am not used to your climate yet. It was so charming in the wood, I went on and lost myself. I wonder you could find me.'

'I thought I heard voices, but I must have been mistaken,' she returned, in a puzzled tone. 'I could have declared I heard Lassie's bark. Oh, Marjory——' suddenly breaking off as she caught sight of the pretty rustic seat; and then, without another word, she went up to it.

Marjory took no notice. She stooped and gathered a violet, and then went leisurely down by the stream, turning her back upon Liliass as she stood before the seat, as though transfixed. She hummed a little song aloud as the other girl at last joined her. A swift sidelong glance showed her that there were tears in Liliass's eyes, but Marjory took no notice. She was looking straight before her, and singing softly a stanza that haunted her.

“ ‘All is vanity, vanity,’
A wise man said to me.
I pressed my true love’s yielding hand,
And answered frank and free.”

‘Marjory!’ exclaimed Liliás, in an astonished voice, ‘where have you heard that song?’

“ ‘If this be vanity, who’d be wise?’ ” chanted Marjory, rather more loudly. “ ‘Vanity let it be!’ ”

‘Marjory!’ pouted Liliás, ‘are you crazy this morning? That is Hurrell’s song. I never heard anyone else sing it.’

‘To be sure,’ returned the girl, quite unmoved; ‘and he sings it well, too—“If this be vanity—hip, hip, hurrah!”—I assure you; with a fine echo, it sounded well all down the hillside.’

‘Do you mean that Hurrell has been here?’ asked Liliás, a little breathlessly. ‘Was that the meaning of the voices I heard? How stupid I am! Of course it was Lassie’s bark; and what have you done with the poor fellow? and why did you not bring him back to breakfast?’

‘My dear, what a string of questions! I think I shall ask some in my turn. Are you not charmed with that rustic seat? and are not those quaint Old English characters lovely? “For,

Lilias." I will never speak against the nineteenth-century young men again; or, if I do, I will tell everyone that there are exceptions; that I have seen with my own eyes a young man who certainly sings well, and can whistle like a black-bird, working like a carpenter before the world was awake, to surprise——' Marjory checked herself abruptly; she was going to say 'his lady-love,' but she substituted 'a friend,' which sounded tame—only Lilias understood her, and her fair face was instantly suffused with a deep blush.

'Oh, Marjory, I wish you would not tease so! just tell me seriously what you really saw.'

'My dear, I saw there would be hundreds of ferns presently in your mossy dell, only they were all curled up in their rusty old hoods, like begging friars, all a-cold; and I saw thousands of primrose leaves and one or two tiny primroses, like yellow eyes in the moss, and a violet;' and, as Lilias uttered a pettish 'Pshaw!' 'Oh, I forgot. There was a good-looking fellow, a woodman, in a dark blue blouse or jersey, and a collie curled up on his coat, and he was singing, "If this be vanity—hip, hip, hurrah!—vanity let it be!"' but, instead of listening any more,

Lilias suddenly started from her side, and was running over the grass towards the house like a lapwing; and Marjory, looking all at once as grave as a judge, followed her demurely.

It was a surprise to Marjory to find that breakfast was laid in Cosy Nook, but she heard afterwards that only luncheon and dinner were served in the dining-room.

The old hall looked as quaint and comfortable as ever in the morning light. A large fire blazed in the old-fashioned grate, which looked as though it would have held a quarter of a ton of coals. A beautiful tiger-skin lay before it, and a Turkey carpet filled up the centre of the dark oak floor. The front door stood open, and, as Marjory took her place at the round table, she could look across the lawn and beyond it at St. Kilda's Castle, with the sun shining through its ivy-mantled archway and ruined towers.

Mrs. Carr had greeted Marjory kindly, and had asked if she were rested; and then, as Lilias poured out the coffee, and assisted Fleming to prepare a breakfast-tray for Barry, she sat opening her business letters and papers. She looked a little grave and preoccupied over them, and took no part in the conversation that was

carried on between the girls, until Liliás roused her gently.

‘Mother dear, I know you will be dreadfully busy this morning, and I suppose some of the tenants will be up by-and-by, so I will take Marjory out; and, after luncheon, we are going over to Redlands.’

‘Yes, dearest,’ returned Mrs. Carr quietly, ‘I think that will be best. Barry will be down here presently, and we shall have some business to settle together. I expect we shall have a relay of visitors until luncheon. Mr. Moore will certainly call.’

‘Then you shall be left to hold your court in peace, like a dignified châtelaine,’ returned Liliás, kissing her hand. ‘Would not my mother have made a splendid châtelaine of some old feudal castle in the middle ages, Marjory? I can fancy her, when the portcullis was raised, and the wounded knights were brought in, coming down the courtyard with her damsels behind her, and her keys jingling from her girdle, ready to bind up wounds, or reward the victor, or——’

‘Nonsense, you madcap!’ returned Mrs. Carr, smiling; ‘I should not have done for the middle ages at all. If historians are correct, the

mediæval lady spent her day in spinning and working tapestry and culling herbs for simples. They saw the world through a loophole in their tower. That sort of existence would not suit my active mind at all.'

'But you would have looked so lovely in a hood and wimple,' returned Liliás playfully. 'Marjory, I am half inclined to put you in the cushioned recess in that bay-window—you would know then how the Mavisbank courts are held. Mother will sit in that high-backed chair looking like a queen; and the farmers—her tenants, you know, or rather Barry's—will come up, and pull dirty bank-notes out of their pockets; and mother will talk to them about their families and farms. And some of the answers would astonish you, especially if the cottagers came up. They will tell mother that "lile Geordie has a sair heed," or "they're starvt amyast, because Short-horn gives lile milk;" or "their fence is broken, and titter it's dune an better;" or "it is gradely weather;" or "it keeps haddering and raining, and they have left the bit lad to sit i'th' hoos"—and so on.'

Mrs. Carr shook her head with an indulgent smile.

‘ You are just like a little purling brook, Liliás. Marjory will wonder at your nonsense.’

‘ Marjory can talk nonsense herself,’ returned Liliás, with a sudden flash from her hazel eyes. ‘ She is only well-behaved before you, mother. Well, I see no one appreciates my wit, so I will run up to Barry, and then Marjory shall be introduced to St. Kilda’s.’ And so saying, Liliás disappeared behind the Japanese screen, and they could hear her singing in the distance, ‘ If this be vanity—hip, hip, hurrah !—vanity let it be !’





CHAPTER X.

‘DR. MARGARET AINSLIE.’

‘**I**S she not a darling!’ observed Mrs. Carr fondly, as she rose from the table; but as she looked up at Marjory, she was startled at the look of pain in the girl’s eyes—they were fixed on her so strangely, she thought.

‘I do not wonder that you love her so dearly,’ returned Marjory, in a set hard voice; ‘she is so very winning.’

‘I hope I do not love her too much,’ was the low answer. ‘We are to keep ourselves from idols, Marjory—is not that what our Bible teaches us? Sometimes I fear I am too much wrapped up in my children. I cannot imagine any happiness without them. Barry is like me, they say; but Liliás takes after her father—she

has her father's eyes. They are very uncommon, those soft golden-hazel eyes, and you seldom see them with that fair hair. Her father had fair hair too.'

'So had Mrs. Chard's husband,' returned Marjory shortly. The words leapt out without her will. She stopped in some confusion as soon as she had uttered them.

'Robert Deane ! You mean your father, dear, do you not ?' in a surprised tone. 'Yes, it was strange he was so like my Philip, but only in colouring. My husband was far handsomer. I wonder whether you will let me give you a hint, Marjory ? I have not known you long, my dear, but I have grown very fond of you—all Liliass's friends are mine too. But there seems such sympathy between us.'

'You may speak to me as though I were your own daughter,' returned Marjory, in a low, a very low voice ; but her eyes were hidden under their long lashes.

'Thank you, my dear. Then I will venture to give you this hint : Why do you call your mother Mrs. Chard ? Poor Miriam, I know she has her faults, but her child should not disown her. I never hear you call her mother.'

A dark flush rose to the girl's face.

'I cannot tell you the reason,' she almost whispered. 'Please do not speak of her to me. Let me forget her existence!'

'Marjory,' in a shocked voice, 'my child—do you know what you are saying? Forget your mother's existence!'

Marjory raised her eyes and fixed them on Mrs. Carr's face. Their look of agony haunted her long afterwards. They were like the eyes of some tortured animal, she thought, that longed to tell the source of its pain.

It was too much for Mrs. Carr's soft heart, and she drew the girl towards her gently, and kissed her on her forehead.

'Don't look so, Marjory, my dear. What pains you? Can I help you in anything? Poor Miriam! Perhaps you have some reason. I am sure yours is not a hard nature.'

'If it were I should suffer less,' returned Marjory passionately. 'Dear Mrs. Carr, do not condemn me. If you knew all you would hold me guiltless. I am not in fault. Indeed, it is my misfortune that fate has linked us together—her and me. You would pity me if you knew all.'

'Will you tell me, dear?'

'Yes, one day—some day I will tell you, but not now,' she returned, in the same agitated voice. 'Try to love me if you can; no one requires love more. Hush! there is Liliás. Let me go, or she will see something is the matter;' and Marjory walked quickly to the open door, and went across the lawn, hoping the spring air would cool her burning face. If Liliás could see her shaking hands, and knew how her heart was beating, what would she think? But Mrs. Carr, with quiet tact, detained the girl for some minutes beside her.

'Liliás,' she said, when she had finished talking over some domestic arrangement, 'I think your friend Hurrell was right. I am sure Marjory has some secret cause for unhappiness.'

'Mother!' burst out Liliás, 'what can make you think so? Marjory has been as merry as possible this morning; she is so full of fun and spirits. It is only with you that she is sometimes a little grave, and yet I know she is fond of you.'

'Then she has not confided in you, Liliás?'

'No,' in a pondering tone. 'She once told me that she did not love her mother, and

certainly Marjory cannot well be proud of poor Miriam. Marjory is not very good to her, I know; but she is always talking about her adopted mother, Miss Frere, and that nice Mr. Frere. I do not think Marjory is so much to be pitied, after all. I fancy that Miss Frere must be a sweet woman.'

'You are so innocent, my darling,' returned Mrs. Carr, a little sadly. 'Marjory knows more of life than you. I am of Hurrell's opinion, that, young as she is, she has experienced some great sorrow. Poor child, she is very affectionate. We must be kind to her, and do all we can to make her happy.'

'Oh yes,' returned Liliás cheerfully. 'I know few girls are so happy as I am, but then they have not got my mother.'

'Nor Hurrell either,' returned Mrs. Carr, a little mischievously; but her manner changed into pleased attention as Liliás whispered the little secret of the morning—how she had found Marjory in the dell, and the rustic seat with the carved inscription, 'For Liliás.'

'Was it not good of him, mother?' she finished, with a bright, varying blush.

'So good that I think Hurrell ought to have

his reward,' was the meaning answer, which had the effect of sending Liliás to the door to look for Marjory. And in another ten minutes the two girls were walking down the main street of St. Kilda, talking to each other as usual; only Marjory's face was still flushed, and her brown eyes had a misty look in them.

'Now, Marjory,' began Liliás, 'I always told you St. Kilda is very bleak and ugly, so you will not expect to see a pretty village, will you?'

Marjory owned that Liliás had given her a true description as she looked down the long, straggling street, with grey houses on either side in dull uniform monotony, only broken by a few meagre-looking shops, and the portico of the Black Bull Inn; and one house, with a bay-window, looking rather more cheerful than the others, with 'Dr. Ainslie' written on the brass plate.

'Do you mind if we go in here for a few minutes?' asked Liliás. 'I want to speak to Margaret Ainslie. I have been matching some wools for her in London;' and as Marjory had no objection to make to this reasonable request, Liliás knocked somewhat loudly.

The maid asked them into a cosy parlour look-

ing out on the street. A Greek Testament, with a dictionary beside it, lay open on the table; a medical treatise and some writing materials and a knitting-basket, out of which a dark-blue stocking protruded, give an impression of cultivated industry. But before Marjory could do more than notice all these details, a tall, vigorous-looking young woman, with dark hair and spectacles, made her appearance, and at once kissed Liliás, and shook hands cordially with Marjory.

‘My dear Liliás, you are a sight for sore eyes!’ she said, looking at the girl affectionately. ‘I knew something pleasant had happened the moment I opened my eyes this morning; and when I got up, sure enough there was the smoke curling up from Cosy Nook, and I could picture you all sitting there at breakfast.’

‘I knew you would be glad to get us back,’ returned Liliás, who was evidently pleased with her welcome. ‘As for myself, I have been singing “Home, sweet Home” all the morning. Have I not, Marjory?’ but she looked a little taken aback when Marjory replied demurely:

‘I thought “all was vanity” this morning, Liliás.’

'One cannot remember all the songs one hears,' she said, a little pettishly. 'You are a provoking girl; you know you are. Margaret, this is a great friend of mine, only she behaves badly sometimes; but then she has not had my bringing up. Now, I want you both to know each other. Margaret is terribly learned, Marjory. She reads Greek, and has studied physic, and can doctor the poor people as well as Dr. Ainslie.'

'For shame, Liliass! How can you expect anyone to believe you if you exaggerate so abominably? Miss Deane, I hope you will not credit all she says about me. Because I like to dabble a little in things women generally eschew, there is no reason why I should be held up as a strong-minded creature. I am not a female doctor, though I do learn a little from my father. I have a passion for making myself useful, and a little medical knowledge goes a long way in these benighted parts.'

'Margaret, how dare you prevaricate, you wicked woman, when you know you can read Latin and Greek quite fluently! Why, Marjory, she teaches the Vicar's little boys, Raymond and Bertram.'

‘I do not deny the fact,’ with a smile that lighted up the plain, sensible face, and made it attractive. ‘I have had a boy’s education, as you know. I am sorry if I appear egotistical, Miss Deane, but this naughty girl has put me on my defence. My father always had peculiar notions on the subject of female education. He thinks girls are flimsy creatures, but that their faults are owing merely to the false training they receive. You are the one exception in his eyes, Liliás.’

‘Except Katie Stallard.’

‘Oh, I forgot that little person,’ returned Miss Ainslie good-humouredly. ‘He certainly tolerates her, but she gets lectured sometimes. I found her half crying one day because my father had been scolding her for being a governess and not knowing Latin. She takes lessons from me regularly now three times a week.’

‘Poor Margaret! how busy you must be!’ observed Liliás, in a pitying voice.

‘Margaret would be more to be pitied if she had not plenty of hard work. But, Liliás, you have twice interrupted me, and I wanted to tell Miss Deane how my father taught me. My poor mother was not allowed a voice in the matter of

my education. I never had a thimble on until I was twelve. Arithmetic, algebra, Latin, and Greek, with history and geography thrown in, were my only studies; botany and anatomy followed. I have taught myself to read French during the last few years, and now Miss Stallard helps me with the pronunciation and grammar. I do not know a note of music. We have no instrument in the house, but I think I should have liked it. I am rather a poor needlewoman, as you may imagine; but I am not too proud to learn, and Mrs. Moore gives me lessons in mending when I go to the Vicarage. After my mother's death I learnt to cook and manage the house, as we have only one servant, and though my father always grumbles when he sees me in the kitchen, his grumbling means nothing.'

'Do you live here alone with your father?' asked Marjory, who was beginning to feel some interest in this intelligent woman.

'Yes, but we are never dull,' was the bright answer. 'I dare say, being a stranger, you think St. Kilda is not a lively place. With the exception of the Carrs and Moores, we have no educated neighbours. My friends are all of the lower class. You need not look shocked, Liliás;

I am really very fond of my poor neighbours. I do not think I was made for society ; I need it so little.'

'Mrs. Wentworth is always complaining that she sees so little of you,' pouted Liliás.

A slight change was perceptible in Miss Ainslie's manner, and there was a moment's hesitation before she answered, in rather a constrained voice :

'She is very good, and you know I am fond of Mrs. Wentworth, but my time is so fully occupied. If you are going to the Vicarage, Liliás, would you kindly give Katie a message from me ? Mrs. Green, our schoolmistress, is so ill that I have promised to go down this afternoon and give the object lesson ; and after that I must look after my patient, George Sparkes. He had a broken head yesterday, and, as my father was not to be found, I plastered it up for him, and——' But here Liliás's clear, silvery laugh interrupted her.

'Dr. Margaret Ainslie. It sounds well, does it not, Marjory ?'

'No, my dear, no,' was the placid answer ; 'I have no ambition of that sort. If it were not for my father, I should not object to be trained

for a medical missionary for Zenana work ; but as long as he lives I should never dream of such a thing. There is his step outside. I must call him in, or he would never forgive me. Liliass is a privileged person in the Ainslie household, I assure you, Miss Deane.'

Dr. Ainslie was the counterpart of his daughter, Marjory thought. He was tall and sturdy-looking, had the same dark hair and spectacles, the same sensible, plain face, and he had the same sweet smile that irradiated Margaret's face so pleasantly. Marjory thought she liked the daughter best. She had a fancy the doctor could be masterful, and perhaps obstinate ; but it was easy to see how fond they were of each other.

'Well, Miss Liliass, so you've come back. Some folks, not ten miles off, will be vastly pleased, I dare say.'

'Margaret was very pleased to see me, Dr. Ainslie,' she returned, blushing under his keen glance.

'Oh, Maggie—I was not meaning her,' he replied mischievously ; 'she always makes a fuss over people. I thought our young squire from Thorpe was driving rather near the Whar-

ton Station last evening. They are a fine couple, the squire and his collie. He has a handsome mare, too, in his dog-cart.'

'Father, you must not let Lilius hinder you,' observed his daughter rather hurriedly. 'Joe Ballater is worse; his father came down again this morning.'

'Aye, "life is a stage," as Will Shakespeare says; and we doctors see most of the entrances and exits of the actors. So Joe is worse, is he? Well, God have mercy on his soul!—that is what I always say, when a fine young fellow like that takes to evil courses, and fights the devil in delirium tremens—it is not going out of life in a trim, orderly fashion. Well, well! I must say adieu, young ladies: I am going up to the house by-and-by to look after Mr. Barry.'

'I think I shall like Miss Ainslie,' observed Marjory, when the two girls found themselves alone. 'I cannot quite make out her age. I should say she is about thirty.'

'You are wrong! Margaret is not quite seven-and-twenty, but her sober, middle-aged life ages her. You will not think her plain next time you see her; her face is one that will grow on you. Mother and I are very fond of her.'

Mother always says she is such a noble, large-hearted woman. And so she is! You have no idea, Marjory, how proud Dr. Ainslie is of her, and the blessing she is to the place.'

'She seems to lead a very useful, self-denying life.'

'You would say so if you had any idea of what she gets through in a day. No wonder she has no time for her richer neighbours, and thinks she has no vocation for society—though that is all rubbish. A cultivated intellectual woman such as she is would do credit to any society. I know Hurrell and Mrs. Wentworth think most highly of her.'

'I am afraid she will look down upon me,' observed Marjory disconsolately. 'I waste my time dreadfully—as Anne says, I have no method. We girls misuse our talents, and let them rust from sheer idleness. I know I ought to study more.'

'Let us make resolutions, as Barry and I used to say when we were little. The only thing is, I never can make my resolutions last a week. Sometimes I am dreadfully virtuous, and get up early and plan out the day, but some one generally contrives to upset it. If it

is not Barry, it is mother. Some one is always wanting me.'

'That is not my excuse,' returned Marjory truthfully. 'Anne is so good and unselfish that she never disturbs me for anything. She will tire herself out rather than ask me to do anything for her when I am practising or reading. Then she sets me such an admirable example of what she calls minor morals, or thrift in time. She hates wasting a minute. She manages the household, and gardens a good deal, and has a district, and attends the mothers' meetings; and yet she does quantities of the loveliest needle-work, and always finds time to do anything for us.'

'I want to know your Miss Anne dreadfully. I am afraid she will beat my Margaret Ainslie.'

'Oh, they are so different! Anne is very clever in her way, and says witty piquant things, but she is also softness and gentleness itself; she is such a tiny creature, and has such a beautiful face, everyone loves and admires her. How can they help it?' finished Marjory, with a sudden break in her voice.

'She must be very nice. I must go to Murrel's End one day and see her. Now this is

the Vicarage, Marjory. But we must first visit the church. This is the only pretty snug corner in St. Kilda. The church is certainly not beautiful, but it has been restored; and the new pews are comfortable. I shall only stay a few minutes with Mrs. Moore, as I must show you the Castle before luncheon.'





CHAPTER XI.

‘ I DISLIKE LIGHT EYELASHES.’

‘ **I** THINK it must be dreadfully cold and bleak here in winter,’ was Marjory’s observation when they had reconnoitred the church, and were descending the flight of stone steps that led from the churchyard to the Vicarage.

‘ Well, I must allow that,’ was Liliass’s reluctant answer; ‘ Dr. Ainslie thinks it is too exposed and bracing for Barry, and there is some talk of our all going to Mentone or Nice next winter. I hope he will not talk mother into doing it; ugly and bleak as it is, I do love St. Kilda, and the scenery all round is so lovely.’

‘ You have friends that you do not like to leave?’ asked Marjory quietly.

'Oh, of course; one has always friends if one is not a hermit,' was the impatient answer; but Liliás did not volunteer the statement to Marjory that the Wentworths might possibly join them if they went abroad. There had been much talk on the subject, but nothing was to be decided until next October. Barry himself was not in favour of the plan; he had a certain hermit-like preference for the lonely house with its dark background of woods; and he thought, like most invalids, that the fatigue of travelling counterbalanced the delights of foreign scenery and perpetual sunshine. But, as Mr. Wentworth was wont to observe, 'one must not heed a sick lad's whimsies.'

'The Vicarage is very comfortable inside, but you must not be over-critical about its tidiness,' observed Liliás, as they came in view of the windows.

There was a long lawn fitted up with tennis-nets at the side of the house, and the door stood open, so that visitors could see the long roomy passage with its numerous hats, coats, and umbrellas. Marjory, who knew there were thirteen children of all sizes in the Vicarage, was not at all disposed to be critical; she rather

expected to find the mistress of the household a careworn woman, and was not a little surprised when a thin, active-looking person, with a bustling manner and a sharp voice, but not at all old, with rather handsome features, came into the drawing-room. She was well-dressed too, though Marjory, of course, could not know that she had been enveloped all the morning in a holland bib-apron, with her merino sleeves tucked well up to her shapely elbows.

‘So you are back, child,’ she observed briskly, and her dark eyes glanced with sharp scrutiny at Marjory; ‘and how are your mother and Barry? Jonathan declared you had come back, for he saw the empty carriage coming out of the gate of Mavisbank; but the stupid fellow had not the wit to ask the coachman.’

‘Yes, we arrived last night. This is my friend, Miss Deane. I have just been showing her the church; and, of course, the Vicarage comes next.’

‘I hope you will like St. Kilda,’ observed Mrs. Moore politely, turning to Marjory. ‘We cannot boast of much society here, but we have plenty of nice neighbours at Thorpe. I suppose, Lillas’—with another needle-like glance—‘that

you will soon introduce Miss Deane to Redlands ?'

'Oh yes,' returned Liliás carelessly, but her colour rose a little ; 'Mrs. Wentworth is very punctilious ; she would never forgive me if I did not pay her a formal call the day after our arrival. And how are all your belongings, Mrs. Moore ?' turning the subject rather quickly. 'Is the Vicar's rheumatism better ? and are all the children and Katie well ?'

Liliás knew what she was about when she put this seemingly harmless question ; the next minute Mrs. Moore launched into a brisk *resumé* of the last few weeks—evidently her domestic budget was full. Marjory soon became hopelessly confused over the multitudinous details—some childish epidemic had evidently run its course through the Vicarage.

'Yes, indeed,' observed Mrs. Moore in her rapid discursive way. 'We may be thankful we have Miss Stallard ; she is a perfect treasure. Gerard always says so ; and the children are so good with her. Alick would not take his medicine from anyone else, and Aubrey used to cry for her.'

'Were they all ill at once, Mrs. Moore ?'

asked Liliás, in a horrified voice ; ‘ all thirteen of them ! ’

‘ Oh dear no ! the elder ones got well before the little ones took it. Ambrose and Julius must have brought it from school, I think. Edith and Helena came next on the sick-list, and then Kenneth and Bertram followed ; and after that Cora and Bessie. Alick was the worst, and poor Aubrey ; the twins had it more lightly, and baby never stayed in her cot a single day.’

‘ And you nursed them all ? ’ in a wondering voice. ‘ I wonder you were not ill yourself, Mrs. Moore, with fatigue and worry.’

‘ Busy people have no time to be ill,’ returned Mrs. Moore, in a gravely admonishing voice. ‘ I never was one to give way ; and I had nurse and Miss Stallard to help me. Alick was very ill, poor lad ! Gerard and I were very anxious about him. Miss Stallard sat up with him three nights ; she is a good creature, and Gerard is right when he says we have a treasure in her.’

At this moment the object of Mrs. Moore’s eulogium entered the room, with a little girl hanging on each arm. They were solemn-

looking children, with their mother's dark eyes, and were introduced to Marjory as the twins, Lois and Lily, or, as they were commonly called, Goosey and Goody. Miss Stallard was a small, neat-looking girl of about five-and-twenty, with fair hair and eyelashes, and soft manners; but Marjory, who was very observant and critical, took rather a dislike to her on the spot, and much astonished Lilius by saying so, the moment they had left the house.

Lilius put up her eyebrows in some perplexity.

'You do not like Katie!' she observed, hardly believing that she had heard aright. 'My dear Marjory, you had better not let Mrs. Moore know your opinion; she and the Vicar think there is no one like her.'

'I can believe that,' returned Marjory scornfully. 'Mrs. Moore, with all her sharpness, and her needle-like propensities, is completely under her governess's thumb. I should think that, in spite of her mildness and humility of manner, Miss Stallard governs the Vicarage.'

Lilius looked at her in a bewildered manner.

'Why, mother and I always say that Mrs.

Moore manages not only her house, but the Vicar and the parish too. You have not seen Mr. Moore: he is one of those mild scholarly men who are ruled by their women-folk. It is all very well for Mrs. Moore to say, as she always does, "Gerard and I think so and so;" it ought to be "I and Gerard," for she makes the poor man see everything through her spectacles.'

'Just so,' returned Marjory obstinately. 'Mrs. Moore manages her husband, and Miss Stallard manages her—and she does it in the cleverest way, too. Why, Liliias, did you not notice how anxious Mrs. Moore seemed for those little girls not to go out? Miss Stallard agreed with her, and then somehow she brought it round that they should go. I am sure I do not know how she did it, for Goosey, as her mother called her, certainly had a cold, and looked far from well.'

'But Katie is so sweet-tempered and affectionate,' remonstrated Liliias. 'You should see her in the schoolroom with all those rough children; she never loses her patience with them for a minute, and she is so kind to them when they are ill. She and Margaret are great friends.'

Marjory was silent : she knew Liliás always thought well of everyone, and never liked to have her faith shaken ; nothing displeased her more than to have the faults of her friends pointed out to her. 'Everyone had their faults,' she would answer with real pettishness, for even Liliás could be cross at such times. 'She was not aware the world was peopled with angels ; she supposed her friends said their prayers, and tried to get rid of their faults. She, for one, could not throw stones at them,' and so on.

So Marjory, with much tact, said no more about Miss Stallard, and was decidedly aggrieved when Liliás brought up the subject of her own accord at the luncheon-table, when they were recounting the history of their morning.

'Marjory does not like poor little Katie, mother. Is it not too bad of her ?' she said, in an injured tone.

Mrs. Carr looked at Marjory in some surprise, but before she could speak, Barry, who was lying on the couch by the fire, clapped his thin hands suddenly together and said, 'Bravo, Marjory ! I don't like her either ; she is too soft and palavering for me. I like Mrs. Moore

ten times better, though her voice does set one's teeth on edge sometimes. I always say so much talking makes her thin; she will be like a thread-paper presently.'

'But she is very good-natured, and manages all those children so well,' observed Mrs. Carr. 'I respect Mrs. Moore; she is such a good wife and mother. Katie is rather a favourite with us all, Marjory; she is so simple and unassuming. The Vicar was full of her praises this morning when he called. And even Dr. Ainslie had a good word for her—he said what a capital nurse she was; and it seems poor Alick and dear little Aubrey were very ill.'

'I always distrust everyone's favourite,' returned Marjory, rather sarcastically. But she was rather tired of hearing about Miss Stallard's praises. Why did they not talk about that clever, sensible Margaret Ainslie? She was far more interesting. 'I will allow Miss Stallard has nice manners, and is rather good-looking, and dresses very neatly. I think that ought to content you, Liliass.'

'Katie is really pretty, Marjory; she has lovely eyes.'

'I did not see them,' returned Marjory coldly.

'She spoke to me without looking at me. And I dislike light eyelashes; they give a meaningless expression to the face.'

And after this, Liliás was too much provoked to say any more. Only Barry said under his breath, 'A sly little monkey that never looks one in the face.' And he exchanged a look of intelligence with Marjory.

Liliás soon recovered her good-humour. As Mrs. Carr observed afterwards, 'She had the loveliest disposition, and never sulked for more than five minutes.'

'I was too bad to vex her by speaking against Miss Stallard,' returned Marjory penitently. 'I ought to keep my opinions to myself; as Anne says, we are always dropping our thoughts for other people to pick up. It is not generous, she often tells me, to make a present of our own rubbish to our neighbour; it is like throwing our weeds over the wall.'

'Are you ready?' exclaimed Liliás's voice gaily, from behind the screen. 'Ruby is coming round, so be quick, you lazy girl!'

'How nice you look, Liliás!' observed Marjory, with a reconciling kiss.

Liliás was dressed in a charming gown of

dark green, with a little velvet hat that set off her fair hair. She had a dainty little whip in her hand, with a gold handle set with dark red garnets. Marjory made her an excellent foil, in her favourite brown dress and jacket, with the pheasant's plume in her hat.

Mrs. Carr looked at them both admiringly.

'Good-bye, my dears,' she said, in her clear voice. 'Drive quietly, Liliass, for Ruby is rather fresh from her long rest.'

'Ruby is not Pepper, Marjory,' observed Liliass, laughing. 'You need not dread another catastrophe. Ruby is so fond of me; she will follow me down the field like a dog, and she puts her nose into my pocket for sugar. She was foaled on Redlands Farm. Hurrell's father gave her to me. I was such a pet with him.'

'Did he give you the whip too?' asked Marjory, not quite innocently.

It was odd that there was something the matter with the harness at that moment, and that Benson, the groom, was questioned somewhat anxiously on the subject.

When the matter was set right, Liliass had a great deal to say about the scenery. Did not Marjory think that line of purple hills lovely,

with the dark shadows playing over them? And could anything be more glorious than the wind that was blowing in their faces, and making Ruby so skittish? And she must look at that meadow that was waving like a green sea. And, oh dear—here her voice dropped quite carelessly—there was Hurrell standing by the little bridge, with Lassie, and Bruno, and Dan, and Jasper—the dear beautiful creatures!

Marjory was quite aware that Mr. Wentworth was watching them from the little bridge. She had caught sight of the tall figure in the brown velveteen coat, surrounded by dogs, before Liliias had spoken. And what must she do now but hum 'All is vanity, vanity, vanity,' which made Liliias bite her lip to prevent herself laughing.

'Good-afternoon, Squire,' Liliias said cheerfully, as he came up beside the low phaeton and checked Ruby's pace by laying his hand on the reins.

'You are late,' he answered quietly, looking in her face. 'My mother's orange pekoe will be spoiled. How do you do again, Miss Deane?'

And then the little procession moved on—Lilias leaning back idly in her seat, and playing with her whip, and all the dogs leaping up round her as though they loved her; Mr. Wentworth walked beside Ruby, talking to her and caressing her, while the sagacious animal turned her nose in the direction of his pocket, knowing that an apple or a piece of sugar would be placed there for her benefit.

‘Hurrell,’ remonstrated Lilias at last, ‘you are making Ruby misbehave herself. How can she turn the corner properly when she is rubbing her nose against your coat? You ought to have received us at the door, and I should have dashed through the village in proper style.’

‘And now all the people will see I have taken you captive; you may as well give me the whip, for I have possession of the reins,’ returned Mr. Wentworth, with a mischievous glance back at her. ‘Down, Jasper! down, Bruno! Why, they are ready to eat you up with joy! Good dogs! why can’t you follow your master’s example, and walk with dignity?’

‘I hope your mother is alone, Hurrell,’ interrupted Lilias, as he guided them into the park with some difficulty; for the dogs’ excitement

made Ruby playful, and she evinced a longing to back into a neighbouring hedge—proceedings that simply amused her mistress, though Benson jumped out rather hastily, and went to the Squire's help.

'Well, no,' he returned slowly; 'a friend of yours, Miss Stallard, is sitting with her. She has brought the twins over, because, she says, Mrs. Moore wanted my mother to see them.'

'How tiresome of Katie!' was on Liliass's lips, but she looked at Marjory and refrained, for it would never do to own that she found Katie in the way; so she only observed, with a pretence of being pleased:

'What, Goody and Goosey here? the funny little dears! Well, Mrs. Moore did say something about your mother; but I suppose I was inattentive, for I certainly did not hear Katie say she was coming to Redlands.'

'She only told Mrs. Moore that a brisk walk might do Goosey good,' put in Marjory, who never could hold her tongue. She, at least, was sure that Redlands had never passed Miss Stallard's lips.

Liliass looked just a little blank. 'I suppose it was an afterthought,' she said presently.

‘Dr. Ainslie has just driven up,’ continued Mr. Wentworth. ‘He is a good fellow, but he always comes when he is not wanted. I wish my mother would not encourage all the neighbourhood to drop in to afternoon tea. I generally contrive to give the drawing-room a wide berth about five o’clock.’

‘Very well,’ Mr. Wentworth, replied Liliás wickedly; ‘then I shall know when I am likely to have a cosy chat with your mother.’

‘Oh, you,’ he observed in a significant voice; ‘I should always know if you were here—all the dogs about the place would publish that fact to me. Lassie would let me know, wouldn’t you, old girl?’ and the look that accompanied his words made Liliás jump up and hand her whip to Marjory; for she might as well walk, she said, as go that ridiculous pace, as though the dear dogs were being taught to follow a funeral. But she gained little by this piece of impatience, for Mr. Wentworth left Ruby in Benson’s charge, and took her lightly by the arms and lifted her out; and then he walked very close to her, and talked in a low voice, so that Marjory could not hear what he said: she could only observe that Liliás was

listening with a heightened colour, and that for once her merry tongue was silent.

Marjory sat in the phaeton until they chose to join her; she was in no hurry to go indoors. The old red-brick house, with its climbing ivy and creepers, took her fancy. The door was open, and she had a full view of the long, dark hall and oak staircase; a sort of park-like meadow studded with old trees stretched to the road. She remembered Liliás's description; she had spoken of a trim little lawn behind the house, with a sunny flower-garden; but Marjory could only see a belt of encircling meadows with picturesque groups of cattle, and low fences dividing them from the little park. It was all so still and sunny and peaceful; in her heart she thought it far more cheerful than the dark woods of Mavisbank. Liliás would have a lovely home, she said to herself.

'We have kept you waiting a very long time,' exclaimed Mr. Wentworth, hurrying up at this moment; 'but we waited in the field-path a few minutes; I wanted to show Miss Carr our new Alderney.'

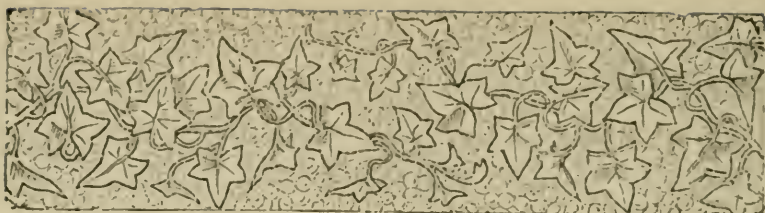
Marjory accepted the young squire's excuse blandly; she had seen the pretty dappled crea-

ture striking its horns against the little gate. If Liliás had tears in her eyes that she seemed anxious to hide, it was not for Marjory to notice them. Mr. Wentworth's face was flushed too, and his mouth was twitching nervously under his brown moustache as he assisted her to alight.

'You will find my mother in the drawing-room,' he said, as he looked up the staircase after them. 'I see Owen is there to open the door for you, so I will join you by-and-by.'

'Take care, Marjory; the stairs are very slippery unless you are accustomed to them,' observed Liliás, as she led the way. She had made no sort of reply to Mr. Wentworth; only as she paused for a moment at the top of the staircase she looked down into the dark hall, and Marjory could not forbear a curious glance in the same direction.

Mr. Wentworth was standing there watching them. As Liliás's eyes met his, a quick smile passed over his face, and as he turned away they could hear him whistling carelessly: 'All is vanity—hip, hip, hurrah!—vanity let it be!'



CHAPTER XII.

AN AFTERNOON AT REDLANDS.

AS the girls entered the large, old-fashioned drawing-room, a tall, handsome-looking woman, with silvery-grey hair, rose from a low chair by the fire.

‘My dear, how late you are!’ she said, a little reprovingly, as Liliias kissed her; ‘Owen brought up the tea a quarter of an hour ago. What have you done with Hurrell? he went to meet you. And is this your friend Miss Deane?’

‘Are we late?’ asked Liliias innocently. ‘You must scold Hurrell, then, for he would show me the new Alderney, and he hindered us frightfully—did he not, Marjory? he and the dogs. How do you do, Dr. Ainslie? we have

met before. And, Katie, why did you not tell me you were coming to Redlands? But I suppose it was an after-thought.'

'After-thoughts are much the nicest,' returned Miss Stallard quietly. 'Dear Mrs. Wentworth, I hope you will let me make the tea: there is nothing I love so much as to be useful.'

'That is Liliass's duty,' observed Mrs. Wentworth, with an affectionate look at the girl.

But Liliass, who was drawing off her riding-gloves for that purpose, suddenly changed her mind, and sat down, lifting Goosey on her lap.

'Katie shall do it this afternoon. I mean to stay in this cosy corner with you and Goosey, and Goody shall hand the cake.'

It was evident Miss Stallard approved of this arrangement, for she took her place immediately, without any further pressing, at the little square tea-table; and Dr. Ainslie, being the only gentleman present, at once offered his services. It was impossible for Marjory to deny that, in spite of the obnoxious eyelashes, Miss Stallard was certainly pretty. Her features were good; she had the soft, pale complexion that never tans or freckles, and she had white dimpled

hands like a child's; her figure, too, was neat and rounded.

The Redlands drawing-room looked very cosy this afternoon: there were three tall windows with old-fashioned cushioned seats, looking down over the little sloping park; the fire shone ruddily on the cupboards of china; the sunshine streamed in on the Indian cabinets and old oil-paintings; there was a faint smell of pot-pourri from the tall blue jars on either side of the fireplace; the painted ceiling and wooden panelling were all in keeping with the old, well-preserved furniture.

It struck Marjory that Mrs. Wentworth was as picturesque as her room. Her white hair and worn look, perhaps the result of ill-health, made her look ten or twelve years older than Mrs. Carr. She must have been strikingly handsome in her youth, and her features were still very fine; but they lacked Mrs. Carr's sweet serenity of expression.

There were downward curves round the mouth, and a slight pucker in the forehead, that spoke of a nervous, perhaps a fretful, temperament; her manners were a little precise and old-maidish. She could not have married late

in life, for she was only two years older than Mrs. Carr, and Marjory wondered how a married woman, with a grown-up son, should have become so prim, so like an old maid.

Perhaps her thin angular figure, a little stooping from weakness, gave Marjory this impression; but she understood at once why Lilius had called her punctilious—little faults would be magnified in Mrs. Wentworth's eyes, and little virtues heightened into great ones. Perhaps her life had become narrow and monotonous with its round of daily small cares and joys. Marjory felt she would admire and like her, she might possibly come to love her in time; but her affection would always be tempered with reserve.

It was only large bountiful natures, such as belonged to Mrs. Carr and Anne, and Mr. Frere, that could attract and retain Marjory's fastidious heart; narrower and lesser natures, though good of their kind, failed to awake any enthusiasm in her.

Before five minutes were over, Marjory had decided that Mr. Wentworth must have resembled his father, and she even went so far as to pity him for having a mother who, in

spite of looking like a beautiful old picture, was evidently full of small wants and wishes, that must draw largely on his man's patience ; for a fretful chord in a voice betrays more than its owner knows. There was plainly a large margin of discontent somewhere, that might fill in rather a dreary border to a winter's evening, when the mother and son were alone together.

Marjory's youthful shrewdness was seldom at fault, and yet Mrs. Wentworth was very kind and courteous to her, and to her other guests ; while she seemed to look upon Liliás as her own daughter, whom she might blame and praise as she felt inclined, and nothing could be sweeter than Liliás's manner in return. It was only when her son entered that her voice took its first jarring note.

'Hurrell, where have you been ? Dr. Ainslie has had to wait upon us all. It is too bad of you to absent yourself.'

'I was shutting up the dogs,' he returned quietly. 'Dr. Ainslie, I must apologize for causing you so much trouble. Can I wait upon anyone now ? Miss Stallard, I have never seen you perform that duty here before,' standing

behind her chair; but his eyes rested on Liliass a little reproachfully. It was plainly repugnant to him to see Miss Stallard presiding at his mother's tea-table.

'Miss Stallard makes excellent tea,' observed Dr. Ainslie complacently. 'She always remembers that I take two lumps of sugar, and that I like the milk put in first. She has learned the trick from Margaret.'

'I am afraid I am not so well acquainted with Mr. Wentworth's taste,' returned Miss Stallard modestly.

'Thanks—I will help myself,' returned Hurrell absently. 'Mother, I hoped you would have induced these young ladies to stop to dinner.'

'What, forsake Cosy Nook the first evening?' returned Liliass, pretending to be shocked. 'Mrs. Wentworth knew better than to ask me.'

'Yes, of course; Hurrell, how can you be so thoughtless? What would Mrs. Carr say if we robbed her of Liliass the first evening? I should have been delighted to have you, my dear, for Hurrell always says he finds the evening so dull—not a compliment to his mother. But you and Miss Deane must come over one afternoon next

week and stay, and Hurrell shall drive you home in the dog-cart.'

'We will see about that,' answered Liliás quietly; and then Dr. Ainslie joined them, and Mr. Wentworth put down his half-finished cup and took possession of a vacant chair by Liliás; but she seemed to be occupied with Goosey, who was still on her lap.

Miss Stallard, evidently finding herself left out in the cold, whispered to Goody to be quick and finish her cake, and then sat down by Marjory, turning her pretty profile to the others.

'I am so glad you have come to stay at Mavisbank,' she began cordially; 'it must be so dull for Miss Carr to have no sisters or companions of her own age.'

'I do not think Miss Carr is ever dull,' returned Marjory, a little dryly.

'Oh no; she is too sweet-tempered and affectionate ever to seem so. But we girls all need companions,' with a sudden flicker of the sandy eyelashes. 'I know what it is to be solitary myself. You are fortunate, Miss Deane, in being spared a governess's trial.'

'No one is without trials,' she replied coldly. From the little she had heard of Miss Stallard,

she certainly did not think her an object for pity.

‘Oh, I know what you are thinking, Miss Deane,’ in her softest tone. ‘You have been at the Vicarage this morning, and I dare say dear Mrs. Moore was saying kind things about me. I wish I deserved them more.’

‘Mrs. Moore certainly expressed herself very kindly about you,’ was the curt answer.

Marjory was not desirous of a prolonged *tête-à-tête* with Miss Stallard; but what was she to do while Mr. Wentworth monopolized Lilies and Dr. Ainslie was talking to their hostess, only casting a sharp glance through his spectacles, now and then, at Miss Stallard and herself.

‘Dear Mrs. Moore, how I love her!’ returned Miss Stallard, with a little gush of feeling. ‘Other people think her sharp and unsympathizing; but that is because they do not know her. They just judge from her outside manner; but to me she is kindness itself.’

‘That must make it very pleasant for you.’ Marjory was beginning to wish that Miss Stallard would not be quite so confidential.

‘I was dreadfully afraid of her when I first arrived at the Vicarage,’ went on Miss Stallard.

‘That was only a year ago. My poor father was just dead, and we poor girls had to turn out into the world—rather a bitter ordeal when one is not used to work.’

Marjory bowed her head in assent. She was half afraid Dr. Ainslie was listening; while Mrs. Wentworth knitted and kept up a running fire of remarks.

‘I was such a silly, frightened thing that I could not help crying. It was very foolish for a governess to behave so, but I had never been from home before; and I was thinking of my mother and sisters, and longing to be back with them. It was so terrible coming among strangers, but dear Mrs. Moore was so good to me; she told me to cheer up and be a good girl, and the Vicarage would soon be like home to me.’

‘I dare say you found it trying at first.’

‘Yes, indeed’—and here Miss Stallard sighed gently; ‘dear Mrs. Moore! I would not have her know for worlds how tired and good for nothing I feel at the end of the day. It is better to wear out than rust out; but with thirteen children!’—and here Miss Stallard opened her blue eyes rather widely; in colour

they resembled a kitten's, but they were not so expressionless.

‘But they were not all your pupils,’ exclaimed Marjory, who could see no traces of overwork in the smooth young face before her.

‘Oh, of course not,’ rather hastily; ‘Ambrose and Julius go to school now, and the four youngest are in the nursery.’

‘And Miss Ainslie gives Kenneth and Bertram lessons,’ put in Marjory.

Miss Stallard looked a little confused. ‘Oh, did dear Margaret tell you that? Is it not wonderful to think she is such a Greek scholar? She is so clever, so original, she makes me feel such an ordinary common-place mortal beside her. Yes, Edith and Helena and Cora and the twins are my regular pupils; but I do not stand on my dignity, I assure you. I have a passion for making myself useful. Sometimes I go into the nursery when nurse is out, or I help the boys with their lessons; and as for mending—oh dear, how I am rattling on! and there is Dr. Ainslie going. Dr. Ainslie’—as he came up to them—‘I am not quite happy about dear little Lois—Goosey we call her; she does not seem quite the thing. She was tired with

walking here ; and I am sure I do not know how I shall get her home.'

'Humph ! the walk is too long for her, I suppose. Why should I not give you all a lift back ? There is plenty of room in the old trap.'

'Oh dear no, Dr. Ainslie, I could not think of such a thing ; it is just like your thoughtfulness. I always tell Margaret how kind you are to the children. But if Goosey gets too tired I must carry her.'

'Nonsense, Miss Katie ; a little creature like you carry a big child of seven ! Come ; I shall take no denial. Run along, Miss Goosey. And what do you call the other one ? Please don't keep me waiting.'

'Is it not kind of him ?' observed Miss Stalard, in an audible whisper. 'Come, darlings ; we must not keep Dr. Ainslie waiting ;' and she swept the little girls before her in a playful way.

'That is a good girl,' observed Mrs. Wentworth, as soon as Katie had disappeared. 'I am sure I do not know what Mrs. Moore would do without her ; she is more like her daughter than her governess. She is a most useful, unselfish little creature.'

'I don't think you quite agree with my

mother,' Mr. Wentworth said in an undertone, as he stooped to put a pine log on the fire; and he looked at Marjory with amused eyes. 'I could not help seeing your face when you were talking to Miss Stallard just now; it is easy to see that you are not taken with little Miss Katie.'

'Please don't betray me,' returned Marjory, with a laugh; 'I have got into disgrace already with Miss Carr for not appreciating her favourite. I am far too ready with my likes and dislikes. I do not care for Miss Stallard, and I have taken a fancy to that nice plain Miss Ainslie.'

'Is Margaret plain?' he asked in surprise; and then he sat down by Marjory, for his mother and Lilius were talking rather earnestly together, and he did not care to interrupt them. 'Oh, you are right. You are a keen observer, Miss Deane; your remark proves that. Now, I have not reasoned on the subject, but all the same I am rather indifferent to Miss Katie—people here generally call her Miss Katie; they make a pet of her. But with all her softness and gentle manners, I feel convinced she has a strong will of her own.'

'Oh, I am sure of it,' returned Marjory,

pleased to find that this honest, frank-spoken young squire was on her side.

‘As for Margaret, she is good as gold; but her masculine education has made her a little awkward. You must not be shocked at my calling her Margaret; we were old playfellows, and she did a good many of my Latin exercises for me when I was a little dunce of a boy. My mother thinks most highly of her, and so do I. I wish we could have her more with us; but Dr. Margaret Ainslie, as Lilius calls her, is too busy a woman to be often spared.’

‘Marjory, we must really go now, as we shall not be in time to dress for dinner,’ observed Lilius, rising a little reluctantly from her warm seat. ‘Good-bye, Mrs. Wentworth. Mother will drive over and see you in a day or two, and I will bring Marjory again next week. I must take her to St. Theobald’s to-morrow.’

‘I dare say I shall see you there. I have some magistrate’s work there in the morning.’

Mr. Wentworth looked very pleased when he made this statement, but Lilius seemed a little embarrassed; she shook hands rather quietly with him, as he opened the little gate that led

into the park, drove on in silence until Thorpe lay behind them, and then she asked Marjory rather abruptly how she had enjoyed her afternoon.

'Very much,' was Marjory's answer. 'Redlands is such a nice old house, and I liked that quaint old drawing-room.'

'You should see the library; that is Hurrell's favourite room: it is panelled in oak, and though it is rather dark, it looks so comfortable in the winter evenings, with the old-fashioned oak settles drawn round the fire. It is not Cosy Nook, of course, but it is a fine old room. Poor Mr. Wentworth was rather proud of his books!'

'Why does Mrs. Wentworth say that her son finds his evenings dull?' asked Marjory, rather incautiously.

Lilias hesitated a moment.

'Well, you see, it is a little dull for Hurrell,' she said at last. 'Men are not like us, Marjory; they want more amusement. Mrs. Wentworth is a dear woman, and I am very, very fond of her; but, of course, I can see that she is a little trying at times to Hurrell, although he is so good and patient with her.'

'She has been very handsome.'

‘Exceedingly so ; she and my mother were called the Westmorland belles. I think Mrs. Wentworth was rather spoiled by her husband, and after his death she fretted her health away. You see, Hurrell is very active and strong, and his out-of-door life makes him hardy. Nerves are a mystery to him—he cannot understand all his mother’s whims and fancies ; a daughter would be more to her. There was some talk of Katie coming to her as a companion, but Hurrell did not like the idea, and so she gave it up. But I cannot help thinking it a mistake on Hurrell’s part ; Katie would have been such a comfort to Mrs. Wentworth.’

‘Would you have liked it ?’ questioned her friend, in some astonishment.

‘I should have no right to object,’ was Lilius’s curt answer ; but she coloured up excessively, as though the remark displeased her. ‘My advice was not asked on the subject, or I should certainly have given my vote for Katie. It was wrong of Hurrell ; he is not generally selfish, but in this matter I think he neglected his mother’s interest. Mrs. Wentworth is often ill, or ailing ; she has a very useful maid in Simmonds, but Katie would have

amused her and read to her—she sings like a little bird, too. Hurrell would not have complained so bitterly then of their dull evenings.'

'I can understand how Mr. Wentworth feels about it,' replied Marjory. 'I like him so much, Liliás, he is so frank, so true; "*Loyale je serais durant ma vie*" seems stamped on his face.'

Now there was no reply to this, but the little gold-handled whip trembled slightly in Liliás's hand, and a sudden moisture came into the hazel eyes; but a moment after, when she made some casual remark to Marjory, her face was perfectly radiant.

It was late when they drove in to Mavisbank. Mrs. Carr was already dressed in her velvet gown, and was sitting in her favourite carved chair, talking to her son, when the girls entered the hall.

'Liliás darling,' she observed gently, 'you are always late when you go to Redlands: the gong sounded ten minutes ago.'

'Oh dear! I will not be five minutes dressing,' exclaimed Marjory, shocked at their unpunctuality; but Liliás said nothing—only

went out as demurely as a cat who had been stealing cream, though why Mrs. Carr and Barry laughed at this sudden exit baffled Marjory.

Lilias was a little quiet all dinner-time, but when they adjourned to Cosy Nook for the evening, the old merry mood returned. Marjory was singing; she must join her in some duets—their voices would blend admirably together; her mother and Barry should have a treat.

Mrs. Carr acknowledged she had spent a delightful evening, when the girls had fairly exhausted themselves.

Hurrell must come and listen to them, and they must sing trios and glees—‘Oh, who will o’er the downs so free!’ and ‘The Chough and Crow,’ and all their old favourites; and she thought Margaret might be asked one evening, she was fond of music—and there was little Katie, too, she sang charmingly.

‘Oh yes, they may all come,’ returned Lilias carelessly.

And then, as Mrs. Carr went off to wish Barry good-night, as he had retired early, the girls were left alone in the hall.

Lilias was kneeling on the black bearskin rug before the fire, and Marjory was on a low seat close to her. Marjory suddenly leant forward and touched her softly.

‘Lilias, it has often come into my head to ask you something, but I never have. I have told you about her—Mrs. Chard,’ speaking the name with an effort, ‘and about the old days, but you have never told me, in return, that you remembered them.’

Lilias turned her face; there was a little surprise in her eyes.

‘Well, no, Marjory; it was your manner, I fancy, that kept me from speaking—you always seemed to avoid the subject so decidedly.

‘But you do remember?’ persisted Marjory, with some anxiety.

‘Not very much, I am afraid,’ was the frank answer. ‘Of course, Miriam’s name was familiar to me, but then I was always hearing about her and her troubles. I have a very hazy recollection of my little playfellow.

‘That is very strange,’ returned Marjory, in almost a troubled tone. ‘Anne often told me that for many nights after I came to her, I cried bitterly because I could not kiss Sissie.’

‘ I suppose I was Sissie ? ’ asked Liliias gently.

‘ Yes, that was my baby name for you—it was always Sissie ; we used to sleep in the same cot—she has often told me that. Is it not strange, Liliias, to think we were fond of each other all those years ago ? ’

‘ Perhaps that is the reason why I care for you so much now,’ returned Liliias thoughtfully. ‘ I have only an indistinct remembrance of my baby days. I think going abroad blotted them out of my memory ; but perhaps it has something to do with my love for you now. I feel almost as though you were my sister, Marjory.’

‘ Dear little Sissie ! ’ kissing her affectionately, and then a quick change came over her face, and it grew troubled again. ‘ Liliias, will you always try to feel like that—as though you were my sister ? I would not pain you, if I could help it. Oh no, not for worlds ! if I could help it. But if any trouble should come through me,’ and here her eyes grew a little wild, ‘ remember that I always loved you—that I would have spared you if I could. You must never turn against me, Liliias—Liliias, it would almost break my heart ! ’

'My dear, what makes you talk so?' exclaimed Liliás, putting her arms round her. 'Am I one to turn against my friends when I love them, far—far too much? Why, you are crying, Marjory—your eyes are wet!'

'It is nothing, dear. I was only thinking of the old days, and how strange everything is. Good-night, Sissie. See, I am calling you that again, just for the sake of the dear old time when we were children together.'

But as she stooped and kissed Liliás's forehead, a sob seemed to rise in her throat, and she turned hastily away.





CHAPTER XIII.

‘ THERE ARE NO “ BUTS ” HERE.’

THREE weeks had passed away since Marjory's arrival at Mavisbank, and she had become as accustomed to the ways of the household as though she had lived there for years ; save for the knowledge of that strange secret that lay so heavily on her spirits, the days would have passed over her head as smoothly and happily as they did over Liliass'.

Marjory began to understand why Liliass never felt dull at St. Kilda's. That young person, with her gentle sprightly manners and fund of bright humour, was the centre of attraction to the whole neighbourhood ; young and old, poor and rich, all seemed to lay claim to her sympathy. Nothing but the sweetness of her nature and her genuine humility saved her

from being completely spoiled. The very dogs at St. Kilda's, and even at Thorpe, would leap and fawn upon her as though they loved the sight of her.

It was something delightful to see this girl at her work or her play—she threw herself so completely into everything she undertook. The mornings before luncheon were spent by her and Marjory either in working among the flowers in the conservatory, or in painting and embroidering an altar-carpet for St. Kilda's Church in the old hall.

The carpet was to be finished by Christmas, and as Marjory was very skilful with her needle, Mrs. Carr and Liliás found her an invaluable auxiliary.

Barry always remained in his own sitting-room until luncheon; when he was tolerably well, Mr. Moore would come and read with him for an hour or two; sometimes his mother would sit with him and write her business letters in his room; often a message would come for Liliás or Marjory. Marjory never went uninvited, but it was always a happiness to her to be allowed to read to him or talk to him a little. As he grew accustomed to her,

he would order her about, or speak irritably to her as he would to Liliás. And Marjory's quick temper never took fire; she had nothing but gentle words and looks for the poor boy, whose physical and mental sufferings were often so great.

'You are awfully good to me,' he would say penitently; 'I wish I were not such a sulky ill-tempered fellow.' And then Marjory would laugh and make-believe that she had not noticed his crossness; and, indeed, who could have found it in their heart to speak sharply to this poor invalid with his shrunken figure, and the beautiful eyes that always looked at one with such pathetic affection? Certainly not Marjory, who would flush with pleasure when he uttered her name. 'Her brother, her very own brother,' she would say softly to herself, as she went to do his bidding. Sometimes she wondered why Liliás did not grow jealous when he asked for her so often, and treated her with such brotherly frankness; but such feelings were utterly dormant, if they existed at all in Liliás's nature. Jealous of anyone who could give her poor boy an hour's forgetfulness of his pain! No, indeed; it was

she who could not be sufficiently grateful to Marjory.

When Barry was well enough he liked his mother to drive with him in the large comfortable barouche; or if this exertion were too much for him, he would take possession of his couch in Cosy Nook after luncheon. And then his mother must stop with him, or Liliās, or Marjory; and any chance visitor was welcome, who would bring news of the outer world; and if Mr. Wentworth spent two days without coming to see him, Barry could be sulky even with him. But, indeed, the young squire never failed in his attentions; once a day, at least, he was at Mavisbank. What was it that could be done without him? He was Mrs. Carr's referee in all matters of business. It was he who lectured Barry when those morbid fits of depression came on, and the women only made things worse by over-indulgence and petting; then it was Hurrell who must scold the poor boy and make him ashamed of himself.

Sometimes if the work were heavy in the conservatory, and the great pots wanted moving, Hurrell must help them, of course; and how

could they gather the first primroses without him? and in the evening were there not all sorts of glees and trios to be practised? Marjory began to wonder at last at Mrs. Wentworth's long-suffering, and she asked Liliās more than once how Mr. Wentworth could spare her so much time when he had his own farms to look after and his magistrate's work at St. Theobald's; but Liliās only laughed, and said Hurrell was an excellent manager, for he always contrived to do his own business and theirs too—for the idea of Hurrell's being too tired or busy to dance attendance on her whenever she pleased, was one that never occurred to her.

Liliās, with Ruby's help, had made Marjory acquainted with the beautiful scenery that lay round them. She drove her to St. Theobald's, and Marjory was charmed with the grey old market town, with its glorious setting of meadows, and river, and dark blue hills; and they looked at the grand old church, and had tea in the quaint old vicarage, and spent quite a long afternoon there.

It was too early in the year for tennis, and the militia camp was not yet formed on the moor. The gay season for St. Kilda's and St.

Theobald's would come later; then there would be garden-parties and picnics, and all sorts of rural delights. But they were not dull, for all that—oh dear no! There were people to visit at Thorpe; and always guests driving or riding up to Mavisbank, and staying to have tea in Cosy Nook. Liliás and Marjory would find the old hall looking the picture of comfort when they came in from their long drive. There would be a fire—always a fire on those clear spring afternoons; and there would be the tea-table, and the smell of hot cakes; and perhaps Hurrell, or Captain Denison, or the Shaws, or the Morrisés, or some of the Moores, with Katie Stallard, or Colonel Pemberton from Carlisle, sitting chatting with Mrs. Carr and Barry, and waiting until the girls came in, for nothing was ever complete without Liliás.

Once a week they spent an afternoon or an evening at Redlands—so much, at least, was due to Mrs. Wentworth—and then it was a red-letter day for Hurrell; it was evidently a joy to him to see Liliás moving about the old rooms, doing little offices for his mother. Mrs. Wentworth was always less fretful and depressed when Liliás was near her, and, indeed, the whole

household seemed to bow down to the girl, and to regard her as their future mistress. Hurrell would consult her about the garden. Sometimes he induced her and Marjory to ride or drive with him to some outlying farm that Liliass might give her opinion about the dairy, and there was always some eager consultation between the two about the cattle, or the poultry-yard, or the new beehives in which he took such an interest; and, indeed, there was nothing that the squire could do without her. If they were not engaged—and something in Liliass's manner forbade such a supposition—still it was evident that the whole neighbourhood considered the thing as good as settled.

Hurrell's claim was such that no other young man ventured to pay Liliass more than a passing attention. She was perfectly frank with them all, but a married woman could not have been more sedate and dignified. Flirting was an art she failed to understand, and even Hurrell could find no room for jealousy. But all the same, Marjory grew sorry for him before the three weeks were over. He was very patient, very manly in his wooing, but often and often there would be a look of pain on his face as

Lilias treated him with that careless frankness. She was perfectly kind and friendly to him, but the least attempt on his part to break down the barrier she had raised between them made her uneasy and reserved. Marjory saw that he did not understand her, but to her the whole thing was plain as sunshine. Lilias was fighting desperately for her own freedom. She was trying to hide from herself and others that her heart was not in her own keeping. If Lilias could help it, Hurrell should not know his power over her; when he came to understand that, she would lose her liberty.

She was content to leave things as they were, and she wanted Hurrell to be content too. What could be better than their present life? she would have asked him. They saw each other every day; they were good friends, always pleased with each other's company, always well amused and happy. Redlands was dear to her, though not so dear as Mavisbank. She was perfectly happy, and she could not at all understand why Hurrell should rebel against such a charming arrangement. Why should he be in such a hurry to marry when he had a good mother to take care of him? In her opinion there was no

hurry at all. One day, perhaps in a few years' time—but there was no need to think about that now. But all these speeches were reserved for Mrs. Carr; Liliás would hardly have ventured to make them to Hurrell. She had tried to hint it to him once, and she had never forgotten the look with which he had listened to her.

'I see you do not love me yet,' he had said to her. 'I will wait just a little longer;' and then, without another word, he had left her, frightened and unhappy, because Hurrell seemed angry with her. But the next day he came and spoke to her as usual, and Liliás thought she was forgiven, and her face grew radiant again. She went on in her old, light-hearted way, treating Hurrell as her chosen friend, and totally ignoring him in his character of lover; and she was so charming, in spite of her wilfulness, that one must forgive her in spite of one's self.

Marjory, who was clear-sighted in such matters—and what girl of twenty is ever blind to a love-affair?—took up the squire's cause with her usual warm-hearted partizanship; and if only Liliás had given her an opportunity, which she never did, being singularly reserved on this

subject, she would have spoken to her pretty plainly.

Once, indeed, they had a long talk, in which Hurrell's devotion was clearly implied, but his name was not mentioned. Nevertheless, the young man was in both their thoughts, and Liliás winced more than once under Marjory's severe words.

They had been gathering primroses, and when their baskets were full they sat down to rest on the seat that Hurrell had made in the dell.

Marjory had noticed Liliás's quick glance at the Old English letters before she seated herself, and was quite aware of the quiet look of satisfaction that was on her face; but she took no notice, and they began talking of a book they were reading aloud in the evening to Barry.

At present they had made very little progress, for there had been many interruptions. Mr. Moore or Dr. Ainslie had come in to challenge Barry to a game of chess; or Mr. Wentworth had ridden over with the new songs he had ordered for Liliás, and perhaps there would be one that would suit Marjory. So the story was laid aside, and the wax candles were lighted, and the three young people

gathered round the piano, while Mrs. Carr put down her work to listen, sometimes with the tears rolling down her cheeks, for Liliás's voice rang so sweetly through the old hall; and she thought of her Philip who had gone to his rest in the very fulness of his prime, and of her poor boy lying on his couch beside her, who could never be what Philip was. The widow's heart felt oppressed and yet triumphant, for to true lovers there is no death; she had her husband's memory to cherish, her living children to love, and it was still hidden from her that her strongest affection was lavished on another woman's child.

The story seemed to have the strangest fascination for Liliás, and she asked Marjory now what she thought of the heroine, and was she not a dear lovable creature, and would not Marjory have cared for her if she had known her in life? and so on, in Liliás's quick enthusiastic way.

'Yes, she was very nice,' Marjory returned; 'but she was not faultless. Oh dear no; one could not say that of her. Did not Liliás think it wrong of her, for example, to keep that fine-hearted lover of hers on tenter-hooks, not

knowing whether she cared for him or not, or if she would ever bring herself to marry him? For herself, she hated such half-measures.'

'Oh, but she does care for him,' replied Liliás eagerly; 'one can read between the lines easily. And you must remember, Marjory, that we are only in the second volume. Of course, things will come right by-and-by.'

'Do not be too sure of that,' was the unexpected reply. 'He may rebel against her tyranny, and refuse to be dragged at her chariot-wheels any longer; I should, in his case. I would wait until it was "whistle and I will come to you, my lad." I would not stand any more nonsense if I were he; it is just the cat and mouse game that I dislike.'

'Dear me, Marjory, how can you say such severe things?'

'Because they are true; and I detest any kind of moral cruelty. What is play to the cat is death to the mouse. As Mr. Frere says, there is no real fun unless both parties see the point of the joke.'

'Have you heard from Mr. Frere lately?' asked Liliás quickly, as though she wished to change the subject.

'Yes, I have a letter from Anne in my pocket. It is a dear sweet letter. But you must forgive me if I keep it to myself; Anne writes to me as though I were her own child.'

'Of course, I understand such letters should be secret.'

'There is nothing I could not show, but Anne has old-fashioned notions, little scruples about silence and reserve in families. What were we saying, Liliás, about my poor ill-used hero?'

'Oh, not ill-used; please do not utter such a word, Marjory. Indeed Sybil loves him, but she wants her freedom a little longer. She is afraid of the responsibility, afraid of herself, of possible regrets and home-sickness—it is all so beautifully, so naturally told. I wish you would be a little less hard on such a noble creature.'

'A noble creature! well, yes; but she is selfish too. What is a little freedom, a little more pleasure, compared to the thought that she is inflicting suffering on a human being whose only fault seems to be that he loves her too well!'

'But, Marjory,' and there was a faint stirring of colour on Liliás's face.

‘There are no “buts” here,’ returned Marjory warmly ; ‘either she cares for him, or she cares only for herself. When people really love, they are not like that. They do not hold back, and think of possible regrets, and fear responsibilities. If a woman loves a man she gives herself generously ; she is not afraid of a little self-sacrifice. Oh no ; we are not such poor creatures as that.’

‘She is thinking of others, not herself,’ returned Liliás, with a pained look. ‘You are too hard, Marjory ; you do not make allowances for people. Perhaps she would be too glad to give herself, but there are others of whom she may be thinking.’

‘Then it is her duty to think of him,’ replied Marjory steadily. ‘You are wrong, Liliás—you are wrong—you are taking narrow views of a large subject. When a woman has allowed a man to love her——’

‘Perhaps she cannot help it, Marjory,’ interrupted Liliás ; and now her fair face was flushed and uneasy, but Marjory turned her eyes away, and played with the primroses in her lap.

‘If she cannot help it—if she has tried to

help it and failed—I do not see that we need blame her; but Anne says—indeed, I get all my wisdom from Anne—that a girl's vanity is often at fault in such matters. No, Liliás, I must have my say: if a girl or woman allows a man to love her, she has already incurred responsibility—she owes a duty to him. If she return his love, she ceases to belong to herself; no desire for freedom, no inclination, can weigh for a moment in the balance against her obvious duty to give up her own will in consideration of his comfort, to refuse to torture him with delays. No, my dear, no. Sybil, your heroine, may be a noble creature, but to my mind she is faulty and ungenerous.'

'Oh, I am sick of Sybil! I wish I had not mentioned her!' exclaimed Liliás impatiently. 'Good-bye, Marjory; I am not going to listen any more to your grand sentiments. I want some more primroses, and you are dreadfully idle and have not picked half enough.' And she went off, singing as she went; but the uneasy flush was still on her face, and Marjory smiled to herself as she took out Anne's letter, for she knew her words had gone home.

She sat for a long time musing over the letter, while the shafts of sunlight fell aslant the tree-boles and made golden patches on the moss; the little beck tinkled merrily in the grass, there were tiny flecks of foam as the baby waves dashed against the grey boulders; the hooded ferns on the banks were still cloaking their delicate fronds, and among them were silver-weed and bonnie birdeen; while in the damper corner of the dell there was a bright streak where the marsh marigolds grew; and Liliás's beautiful voice was singing:

‘Oh Mary, come and call the cattle home,
Across the sands of Dee!’

until it died away in the distance.

But Marjory's eyes grew sad, as she took up Anne's letter.

‘MY DARLING,’ it said,—‘You have been three whole weeks away from us, and already I feel that we have been separated a long while; but there is no talk of your return; you are busy and amused and happy with your new friends, whom I do not know, but whom I am beginning to love for your sake. Now, it is a strange

thing, that when I read aloud part of your letters to Capel—indeed, he asks for them if I ever try to smuggle them away—though he thinks them clever and amusing and full of description, he will have it that you say so little about yourself and your own feelings, and that he cannot make up his mind that you are happy, in spite of all your fine doings. He has told me this again and again, and always with such a grave face, as though he believes it. And then he walks up and down the room—you know his way—as though he wanted to walk off a troublesome thought. To-day he asked if you had sent him no other message—but, indeed, it was quite a pretty message that I read to him—and I gave him some of the pressed wild flowers, so he ought to have been satisfied; but still he shook his head, and there was a cloud on his face. “If I thought I could do her good—if I could bring myself to believe that it would give her any pleasure, I would go,” he said; but I think he was talking to himself, for he went out of the room directly afterwards. What can he mean, Marjory? You are as happy as possible, are you not, with that dear Lilius whom you love so much? And what is he to bring himself to

believe? Surely not that you would be pleased to see him, when he knows how fond you have been of him from a little child, when you cried and would not be comfortable if you were not allowed to sit up for dear "F'eres."

'It is very perplexing, and troubles me a little, for I am certain Capel misses you sadly. He does not make half so many funny speeches, and he quite forgets to grumble if I stay too long at the district or at the mothers' meeting; and he and Fluff take such long walks, and when he comes back he has such a fagged, tired look, as though he had not enjoyed himself, and I think that you must write him a cheerful, affectionate letter, and scold him for not taking care of himself. And, indeed, if he sits up so late, and smokes so many pipes, and neglects his club, there is no knowing what may happen.'

It was this sentence that frightened Marjory. 'Neglected his club!' When had Mr. Frere done such a thing before? He must be ill, or out of spirits. Could it be about her—could he really miss her so much as that?

'Now, my dear, you must not reproach me for sending you such a dull letter, for you know

we always tell each other all our little worries' ('"All"? Oh, Anne, Anne!' and Marjory's eyes grew dim at this), 'and my own affairs always seem so small beside yours and Capel's. You need not question me so anxiously about my dulness. Dear child, do you not know that there must be a margin of dulness in middle-aged lives? So much lies behind, there is so little to expect. Truly I pity all middle-aged women if they have none to love beside themselves. I have never been without "my darling torment," as Capel used to call you.

'Nellie often comes in to sit with me. The dear child grows prettier every day. It is dull to see her with those solemn-faced children; she is never without one of them. I think Popples is the favourite, but they all adore their future little mamma. Fancy that little round-faced girl being called mamma! I hear that Mr. Brooks is pressing an early marriage on Mrs. Walford. She cries a good deal about it, but Nellie is convinced that he will talk her over, and that it will not be later than August. Of course, you will be her bridesmaid. Now I must water my flowers. The poor things look drooping, and you know I must have everything cheerful round

me, from flowers to human faces, and Capel's does not please me at all.

'Good-bye, my own dear child. I wish you were little Marjory again, to trot after me everywhere. Old maids' children ought never to grow old. It is too hard on a lone woman who has no husband.

'Yours lovingly,

'ANNE FRERE.'





CHAPTER XIV.

‘I WISH I WERE LIKE YOU.’

MARGJORY had seen a good deal of Margaret Ainslie during those three weeks, and she liked her better each time they met. There was something uncommon in the mixture of masculine intelligence and child-like simplicity that lay at the foundation of her character. Her far-sighted views of life were wonderful, considering that she had been brought up in a small country town, and knew little worldly wisdom except what she gleaned from books or conversation with her father. But her extensive knowledge failed to puff her up; on the contrary, she was very humble in her estimate of herself, and would lament her lack of feminine accomplishments with a frankness that was almost pathetic. It was strange to hear

this gifted creature sorrowing because little school-girls in their teens could thump their pieces on the piano to their own satisfaction and their friends' politely-suppressed misery, or achieve studies in chalks and water-colours, or bring home wonderful specimens of ornamental needlework, while she bungled over the simplest sewing, and put in patches with the painstaking labour of a little charity girl. The mysteries of button-holing and darning, which Mrs. Moore was good-naturedly teaching her, were far more difficult to Margaret than the Hebrew lessons that she took secretly from the Vicar.

Marjory's letters to Miss Frere were full of description of this extraordinary Margaret. Anne grew quite interested in her. But Mr. Frere pshawed and pooh-poohed the notion of the village genius. An 'Admirable Crichton' in petticoats, who was conversant with the classics, had studied anatomy and elementary physics, who could dispense medicines on a small scale, and adjust bandages to broken heads, was a sort of impossible paragon whom he failed to understand.

'It is all very well,' he would say in a huffy tone; 'it is a good thing this Dr. Margaret Ainslie, as Marjory calls her, lives in the nine-

teenth century. In mediæval times she would have been burned as a witch. Her father must be crazy to give her this sort of education. If there is one thing I detest, it is your learned, strong-minded female in spectacles.'

When Anne wickedly retailed this speech—for the small woman could be mischievous in her way—Marjory only laughed at this piece of cross-grained satire. She often remembered Mr. Wentworth's question: 'Do you call Margaret plain?' and the tone of surprise in which he said it.

Plain, indeed! Marjory was not at all sure that she was not beautiful. Her features might be strongly marked and irregular, her complexion a little sallow, but who could remember that when one watched her play of expression, and met the full glance of her honest eyes? Marjory rather disliked spectacles herself before she saw Margaret wear them, and she greatly amused Lilius once by her remarking 'that she was sure Miss Ainslie would not be so nice looking without them.'

One wet, wild afternoon, when the lawns of Mavisbank were sodden with rain, and a cold wind was whistling rather drearily through the

wood, Marjory put on her waterproof dress, and went down the street to see Margaret.

Lilias had a headache—rather an unusual ailment with her—but it gave her the excuse for a great deal of petting on Mrs. Carr's part. Perhaps it made Marjory's heart ache too much to see Lilias's fair head on her mother's lap. The headache must have been a very light one, or she would not have wrapped Mrs. Carr's arms round her, and coaxed her to do nothing else but talk to her. Anyhow Marjory felt restless, and the idea came into her mind that a chat with Margaret would do her good.

On the threshold she encountered Mr. Wentworth, who had driven over this wet afternoon to cheer up Barry.

Marjory pictured the scene in Cosy Nook as she made her way down the steep path. Lilias would not change her position, she was sure of that. She was in one of her baby moods, as she called them, and Hurrell would have very little attention paid him. She guessed that he would take the high-backed chair that stood behind Barry's couch, where he could see Lilias's pale face with the fire-light playing on it. He would be listening to the low-toned talk all the time

he was trying to discuss an interesting political question with Barry. Marjory could almost see him pulling his brown moustache, and the eager look that would come into his eyes as Liliás carelessly addressed some word to him.

Margaret was sitting by the window mending an old table-cloth, and Plato's 'Dialogues' lay in her lap; the little parlour looked cosy and home-like, with a great black cat curled up on the rug before the fire, and a basket of primroses on the table.

Margaret greeted her cordially; she was evidently pleased with Marjory's overtures of friendship.

'It is so good of you to take compassion on me this dreary afternoon,' she said gratefully. 'It is doing me a real kindness, for I have a cold, and father will not let me leave the house to-day. Now you must take off your hat, and have tea with us. We have real old-fashioned tea, you know, with no dinner to follow, only a nine o'clock supper. But father will be in by half-past five, and he will walk up to Mavisbank with you.'

'I can stay until half-past six,' returned Marjory, quite satisfied with this arrangement.

‘Mr. Wentworth dines with us to-night, and Liliass will want me to accompany them in some duets—that is, if her headache gets better. Mrs. Carr has sent you a message : she wants you to come back with me, because you are so fond of music ; and really Mr. Wentworth has such a fine voice, it is quite a pleasure to listen to him.’

‘Thanks, not to-night,’ replied Margaret, taking up her work again, and there was a little flush upon her face as she spoke. ‘I can come to-morrow, or perhaps the next day, but to-night it is impossible, with my cold.’

‘I forgot your cold. Never mind ; I dare say we shall have Mr. Wentworth another evening. There are few days that we do not see him, and, indeed, I quite miss him if he does not come.’

‘I dare say Hurrell is a very pleasant companion,’ was the rather hurried answer. ‘Will you tell Mrs. Carr that I will come to-morrow ? There is no need for music ; it is always a change for me to be at Mavisbank. Liliass’s voice is sufficient music for me ; to hear her talking to her mother and Mr. Barry, is like listening to some little beck flowing on in the sunshine. Certainly Liliass is the happiest creature I ever knew.’

‘Yes,’ returned Marjory curtly. But this afternoon she could not talk about Liliás, when she remembered the beautiful hand with the diamond rings flashing in the fire-light, as it stroked the fair braids of hair. ‘Now you must let me help you,’ in a more animated voice. ‘Oh, I can darn splendidly, I assure you ; my dear Miss Frere taught me that.’

Margaret held up her work with a curious little smile. ‘Look at this, Miss Deane ! Would you not suppose a child of eight years old had done that, and not a women of seven-and-twenty ? I would make you a present of my Latin, but not my Greek—oh dear no, that is far too precious to me—if you would give me your skilful fingers.’

Marjory looked at her pretty little hands with a good deal of disdain.

‘Oh, they are so useless,’ she said scornfully. ‘What good have they done since I learnt to use them ? I have never prevented a person from bleeding to death,’ with a playful intonation in her voice ; ‘and I have never bandaged a burnt baby, and treated it so skilfully that it did not die after all.’

Margaret seemed a little confused at this.

‘How naughty of Liliass to tell you! indeed there is nothing in all that. You forget I am a doctor’s daughter; stupid as I am, I feel in my element in a sick-room.’

‘Do you know, I rather envy you,’ returned Marjory seriously; ‘you live such a grand sort of life, and the rest of us girls only fritter it away. Oh, we do no harm,’ as Margaret seemed about to interrupt her, ‘but then we do very little good. Life is a day of small things to us, little pleasures and petty cares, and a good deal of discontent, when we cannot adjust circumstances to our liking; but you—you are different.’

Margaret hung her head—it was a very finely shaped head—as though she were abashed at Marjory’s speech. ‘Oh yes; I know I am different, you need not tell me that,’ in quite a sad tone.

Marjory opened her eyes at this display of humility. ‘You must not misunderstand me, Miss Ainslie. You are only different to us because you are so much better.’

‘Oh no, no—please do not say so,’ quite shrinking from this unexpected praise.

‘Why should I not tell you the truth?’ a little wilfully. ‘We hear Dr. Margaret Ainslie’s praises in every cottage we enter. Sometimes it is “the doctor’s daughter,” or “the good lady up at doctor’s.” Think what grand things you do day after day, while I am just killing time, or making little duties for myself—a little gardening, a little practising, so many visits, so much tennis! And you with your Greek, and your pupils at the Vicarage, and your sick people, and all the good that you do. If usefulness could make a person happy, I think you ought to be happier even than Liliast.’

There was a quick catch of Margaret’s breath as Marjory paused, but a beautiful smile came to her face as she answered her.

‘Do you know, I never talk to myself in that way,’ she said quite simply. ‘What does it matter so much if one be happy, as long as one does the duty that comes to hand. Every day its work or duty. We are not sent into the world for happiness; I have lived long enough to know that.’

‘But all the same, one longs for it,’ observed Marjory a little bitterly.

‘Oh yes; we long for it! There are children

who cry for the moon ; but if it were given to them, the poor infants would be sorely perplexed what to do with it. How strange,' in a thoughtful tone, 'if one's granted wish were given only to crush one with its very magnitude ! Don't you remember, Miss Deane, how the multitude fell a-lusting for flesh in the wilderness, and while the coveted food was between their teeth, the plague broke out among them ; that teaches one to be afraid of wishing for anything too much.'

'Do you not wish for anything, then ?' asked Marjory rather curiously. She could make nothing of the confused colour that mounted to Margaret's forehead, but it passed as she spoke.

'Oh yes ; I have many wishes. I wish, for example, to be a comfort to my father, and to make myself a companion for him. I wish to be of use in the world, and do some good with my talents ; and especially I wish people to trust me, and to feel sure of my sympathy.'

'Yes, yes,' a little impatiently ; 'all this is as it should be ; but surely you have more personal wishes than even these.'

'I dare say,' very quietly ; 'but a busy life

stamps out all such useless thoughts. If I had time to think about myself, I dare say I could coin discontent as cleverly as other people ; but what of that ? We are too ignorant to fashion our own lives ; a beneficent Providence does that for us.'

'Oh, how I wish I were like you !' sighed Marjory ; and she really meant what she said, for her young face was growing thin and sharp with her hidden trouble, and more than once Mrs. Carr had told her that she feared the air of St. Kilda's was too keen for her. 'Oh dear,' in quite a different tone, 'I thought we should be safe from visitors on such a wet afternoon ; but surely that is Miss Stallard crossing the road.'

'Yes, it is Katie,' returned Margaret, laying down her work ; but Marjory did not think that she seemed so pleased to see her as usual. Perhaps she, too, was sorry that their *tête-à-tête* was interrupted by any new-comer. Miss Stallard, on her side, seemed a little taken aback when she saw Marjory.

'My dear Margaret,' she said, kissing her with effusion, 'I am so surprised to see Miss Deane with you ! Am I *de trop*—shall I go away ?'

‘No, indeed ; what nonsense, Katie !’

‘May I stop, then ? I should like to rest a little after fighting that dreadful wind ; it has blown the rain away, but the roads are so muddy. I said to Mrs. Moore at luncheon, I was sure that you would be dull stopping at home all day with such a bad cold. Dr. Ainslie told us you had a cold, so I proposed that I should run over and read French with you, and she quite agreed with me.’

‘You are very kind, Katie dear ; but you see I have a visitor. Noël and Chapsall will hardly entertain Miss Deane !’

‘Never mind ; we can talk, then,’ returned Miss Stallard cheerfully, and she proceeded to make herself quite at home without any further invitation. To Marjory’s secret discomposure she took off her waterproof and hat, and after smoothing her pretty hair, and unpinning her dress, she took out a neat little huswife from her pocket, and asked Margaret for the remainder of the tea-cloths that she was hemming.

Marjory became decidedly moody, as Miss Stallard stitched away and chatted to them both ; not that her silence or Margaret’s sudden

gravity mattered in the least to this young person. Katie was evidently one of those people who see nothing but what they wish to see. It did not enter into her head, apparently, that her presence was not specially welcomed; she talked on breathlessly about dear Mrs. Moore's excellent management, and the Vicar's cough, and Goosey's bad cold that she had caught no one knew how; but of course Dr. Ainslie had been called in, for with a delicate child, and she always would have it that Goosey was extremely delicate, there was no knowing what might come of it—and so on, with many staccatoes and notes of admiration.

Well, it must have been a cheerful sight for the tired doctor when he came in from his rounds, and saw the three young needlewomen gathered round the lamp. Katie had brushed up the hearth, and fetched the kettle from the kitchen, and now it was singing merrily; there were slippers warming on the rug—and it was not Margaret who had thought of that, for her large busy mind sometimes let little things slip.

No wonder the doctor smiled benevolently when he saw these little preparations for his

comfort. No wonder he stood so long on the rug, rubbing his large white hands together, and beaming on the three girls through his spectacles.

Of course, it was Miss Stallard who spoke first.

‘Dear Margaret,’ she said, in one of her audible whispers, ‘will you not ask your father to change his wet boots? and his coat must be damp, it is quite steaming.’

‘Thanks, Miss Katie, for your thoughtfulness,’ interrupted Dr. Ainslie. ‘Of course, I ought to know better. Margaret, my dear, you are a good girl to warm my slippers. I have had a miserable day, and I want all the comfort I can get.’

‘It was Katie who thought of the slippers, father,’ replied Margaret quietly.

‘Oh, never mind who did it,’ returned Katie, with a blush and a laugh. ‘Do please go away, Dr. Ainslie, and change your damp coat, and you will find tea ready on your return. Now,’ in a bustling tone, as soon as he had left the room, ‘I am quite ready to help you, Margaret. You know there is nothing that I enjoy more than making myself useful. And I do love playing at housekeeping; it is so much more

interesting than teaching a lot of stupid little girls.'

'I thought you said the Moores were so quick and clever,' observed Margaret, as she folded up her work.

It struck Marjory that she would rather have dispensed with Katie's help, but she was too good-natured to refuse; so they left the room together, and Marjory could hear Miss Stallard humming a little air gaily as she tripped to and fro between the parlour and kitchen.

'She was dreadfully busy,' she told Marjory, in a laughing tone. 'Dear Margaret would have burnt the cakes, as Alfred did, if she had not reminded her that the oven was too hot.'

She came in with them in her hand presently, and pretended to be shocked when she saw Dr. Ainslie in his easy-chair, for her sleeves were tucked up, showing her round dimpled arms to the elbow.

But the doctor only smiled, and said she was a beneficent fairy, and he was sure the cakes were good; and that Margaret must come and pour out the tea, for he was getting very impatient.

Marjory would have enjoyed the meal very

much if it had not been for Miss Stallard's fussy attempts to bring herself into notice. She would not sit still for more than a minute. Margaret had a cold, and was tired, so she must jump up to replenish the teapot; and then there were more cakes to be turned, and Jane could not be trusted; then there was no marmalade on the table, and she knew Dr. Ainslie never liked his tea without marmalade. And when he had confessed that he had left his paper in his coat-pocket, she must run and look for it.

It struck Marjory that Dr. Ainslie made a sort of pet of this little girl, she was so fair and soft and pretty; and possibly he had not a strong dislike to light eyelashes. Anyhow, he laughed at her in an indulgent way, and made all sorts of civil little speeches, taking very little notice of his grave daughter, though Margaret's quiet eyes followed his every movement. 'The little fairy,' as he called her, was evidently a source of amusement to him.

When Marjory rose to put on her cloak, Margaret asked her father if he were too tired to walk up with her to St. Kilda's; but Marjory instantly negatived this proposition. She knew her way quite well, and she would not trouble

Dr. Ainslie to put on his boots again, all in a very decided voice.

'No, indeed; it would be too cruel—would it not, Miss Deane?' broke in Katie. 'I would rather walk with you myself, only dear Margaret must have her French lessons: we have wasted all the afternoon.'

'Will not Mrs. Moore want you to go back, Katie?' asked Margaret gently. 'You are very good, but I have promised to read to my father.'

'Never mind,' returned Katie pleasantly; 'I will finish the tea-cloths, and it will be such a treat to sit and listen to you; no one ever reads to me. It is nothing but correcting exercises and helping the children with their lessons all the evening in that dull schoolroom. What! are you going, Miss Deane? Jane would have walked with you—would she not, Margaret? Still, if you do not mind, it is a pity to disturb her in her ironing. No, Dr. Ainslie, do not move; I am going to the door with Miss Deane. What is the good of a poor little governess if she does not make herself useful?' and Katie tripped into the passage.

'Good-night, and thank you,' observed Marjory coldly, as she went out. It was nearly seven;

a raw cold, gusty evening, with a settled grey-ness about it, for the light had not faded.

‘How I do dislike that little busybody!’ she said to herself somewhat uncharitably. ‘She is one of those dangerous people who imply more than they say. It is my belief that she puts Margaret in a wrong position. She would have managed quite nicely, cakes and all, if that little chatterbox had not usurped her duties. I shall hate the word “useful” from henceforth, because it is always on her lips. I cannot understand why people make such a fuss about her. Dr. Ainslie took more notice of her than he did of me.’

Marjory’s brief wrath soon evaporated as she walked rapidly down the street. It was the first time she had found herself alone, and it was with a sense of strangeness that she looked round her in the grey half-twilight. The rain had ceased, but the heavy clouds were scudding stormily across the sky. The bare ruins of St. Kilda’s Castle looked desolate in the murky light, and the dark wood above Mavisbank made a gloomy background. There was no one in sight; not even a dog barked to break the supreme sense of quietness. Marjory had a curious feeling as she looked up at the closed

windows of Mavisbank. She felt like a belated ghost entering her rightful home in the gloaming. Within there was warmth, comfort, a fire-side circle ; and she outside, with that dreadful secret lying like a stone on her heart.

'Oh, what nonsense !' she said to herself, as she knocked loudly.

Mr. Wentworth would open the door to her—she knew that ; and she had a smile ready for him as he threw it back.

'How late you are, Marjory !' in quite a vexed voice from Liliass.

'My dear, we have been expecting you for the last half-hour. Hurrell was just starting in search of you,' in Mrs. Carr's gentle tones.

'I am so sorry——' began Marjory, coming forward into the light, while Mr. Wentworth bolted the great oak door behind her, and then she stopped ; and surely she was in a dream.

They were all gathered round the fire, just as she had left them ; but who was that gentleman, with iron-grey whiskers and short silvery hair, who was coming forward to meet her with a smile of greeting on his face ?

'Are you so surprised to see me ?' he said, laughing at her, and taking her hand ; and

there was a quick gleam in his dark eyes. 'My dear, you look almost like a ghost stealing upon us out of that windy darkness. And how are you? and what have you to say to me, Marjory Daw?'





CHAPTER XV.

THE NEW GUEST AT MAVISBANK.

‘**M**R. FRERE, how you have startled me!’ that was all Marjory could say for some minutes ; but she had turned very pale at the sight of him, and there was an odd, wistful look in her eyes ; and it was not altogether pleasure with which she seemed to regard this new-comer.

But if he saw this—and what was there that escaped his scrutiny ?—he took no notice ; only, instead of relinquishing her hand, he drew her gently towards the fire, with the remark that even ghosts liked warmth, but not too much of it, at which Barry laughed.

‘Do you know, Marjory,’ he continued with his usual easy manner, as he placed a chair for her, ‘that I consider myself an ill-used indi-

vidual? The Black Bull is a capital inn—a very capital inn—I took quite a liking to the landlord; but nothing will do for these hospitable friends of yours but my portmanteau—a very shabby one—must be fetched away; and here I am, a free-born Englishman, shorn of my liberty, deprived of all lounging bachelor rights, and condemned to lead a civilized life for the next few days.'

'Do you mean,' asked Marjory, in a low voice, 'that you are to stay at Mavisbank?'

'Of course Mr. Frere is to stay,' interrupted Mrs. Carr, in laughing tones. 'Does he suppose for one moment that we should leave him in that dreary inn, to enjoy Mr. Atkinson's notions of comfort, when there are spare rooms here which it will be a charity to fill? Think what a boon it will be to us all, Marjory, to have some one fresh to amuse us!'

'When did he arrive?' she asked, in the same curiously low tones.

Evidently the presence of this old friend had a subduing influence on her. Mrs. Carr looked up quickly at the girl as she answered:—

'It must have been two hours ago. Liliás

had just rung for tea, when there was a loud knock, and Mr. Frere came in. I am obliged to confess that he gave us a great deal of trouble before he would allow Fleming to fetch his portmanteau ; but he was not proof against two women's coaxing, and so, of course, we triumphed,' with a pleasant smile at her guest.

'It was I who put the finishing stroke, mother dear,' observed Liliás merrily ; for, strange to say, Mr. Frere had remained silent after his little speech. 'You were losing ground very plainly, I could see that, when I said how pleased Marjory would be to see him sitting in Cosy Nook, and of course that settled it. Hurrell sent Fleming off the next minute, and ever since then he has been praising up the Black Bull.'

Marjory smiled. She quite knew how Mr. Frere would talk, and the pleasure with which they would listen to him.

'You are all dressed for dinner, and I shall be late,' she said, starting up ; and, without another glance, she disappeared behind the screen.

'I am afraid you are disappointed in Marjory's appearance,' observed Mrs. Carr rather

anxiously; for her guest was looking grave—very grave indeed, and a sort of smothered sigh had escaped him as the girl left the hall. ‘You will not give us credit for our care of her; but I have taken it into my head that the air of St. Kilda’s is a little too keen for her. In another few weeks it will be better.’

‘She is looking thin,’ was the reply. ‘Perhaps the air does not suit her; and yet Marjory is very hardy. If she be willing to go south with me, we shall be only too glad to get her back.’

‘Oh, we cannot spare her yet!’ returned Mrs. Carr, in an alarmed tone. ‘We have grown so fond of her; she seems to belong to us somehow. Lilius and she are such companions, and even Barry will miss her. Indeed, we cannot let you have her just yet!’

‘You are very good,’ he answered quietly. ‘Anne tells me you are all spoiling her child; but, all the same, she is very grateful to you. Please do not mention this to Marjory for a day or two. If she does not wish to come home with me, I will leave her with you a little longer.’

‘That is generous on your part, and we will

promise not to be selfish,' she returned, with a winning smile.

She had taken a fancy to this keen-eyed, clever-looking Mr. Frere. She thought that even a girl might learn to care for him, notwithstanding his grey hairs. There was a certain freshness of youth about him, in spite of his whimsical bachelor ways, and a latent strength and quiet intensity of purpose under that careless, easy-going manner. Indeed, before the evening was over, Mrs. Carr had quite made up her mind that Mr. Frere was one of the most fascinating men she had ever met.

He was certainly a little abstracted at times. Now and then his rapid, discursive talk died away rather unaccountably into silence ; but it was always when Marjory spoke, or when her light step passed by him. A keen observer would have noticed those quiet, searching glances that followed the girl as she swept through the old hall ; how, under the shading hand, his eyes rested on her face as she sang with her companions or talked to Barry. But no one could have guessed the sudden contraction of pain that seemed to grip his heart as he watched her. He had not been prepared to see

this change in her. What would Anne say if she saw her darling now? The beautiful young face had grown sharp and thin with some secret anguish. When she laughed and talked it was the old Marjory. It was only when she was silent, when her features were still, that the subtle change was perceptible—a hardening of the lines round the mouth, a set look, a deeper shadow in the honest brown eyes, which looked as if they did not always sleep well. All this was plainly visible to the friend who had watched her face from infancy, and had grown to love it as a man loves the face of a woman who is dearer to him than life.

It seemed to Mrs. Carr that Marjory was rather reserved with her old friend, that she spoke very little to him, and did not once place herself beside him. She had demanded the home news at the dinner-table, and he had answered all her questions in a pleasant, good-natured way. But there had been no attempt on Marjory's part to secure him for a quiet *tête-à-tête*, though it would have been easy to find a secluded nook in the great hall. On the contrary, she seemed to have avoided any opportunity for private talk. She had kept her place at the piano the greater

part of the evening, and had then taken refuge by Barry's couch. Was it possible that she could have been afraid of him? Mrs. Carr felt herself puzzled by the girl's behaviour.

Marjory could not have explained the sudden terror that she felt at the sight of Mr. Frere. He had kept his word, and had followed her to make sure that things were well with her. Was it not for her to feel grateful for such devotion? Why did she dread so much those keen, yet kindly looks, that seemed always questioning her? Why would he not understand that it was freedom she wanted—freedom to think her own thoughts and indulge in her own miserable reflections, out of reach of even loving supervision? To be alone with him—oh, that was what she most dreaded! and yet, with the strangest contradiction, she had never felt so fond and proud of him as she had that night. She had never been so conscious of his power over her.

Even when he wished her good-night, and her hand was resting in his, she seemed only anxious to escape.

‘Marjory,’ he had said, watching her varying colour and downcast eyes, ‘I have not had a word with you yet. To-morrow we must have

one of our old walks together ; and you must show me your pet antipathy, Miss Stallard, and this wonderful Dr. Margaret Ainslie, and your grand ruined castle, and the seat in the wood, and all the St. Kilda's curiosities, animate and inanimate.'

'Oh yes, we will come. Liliás and I will take you everywhere,' she answered, wilfully mistaking his meaning, that they two should have one of their old *tête-à-têtes*. She looked up as she spoke, and was a little dismayed at the amused, half-pitying look with which he was regarding her. It said so plainly : 'Poor child, I see you have grown afraid of me ; but what are your simple girlish purposes compared to my man's will ? Do you think, for all your poor little plots, that you can escape me ?' And Marjory hung her head, and blushed almost as though she were a child.

But he took no notice of her confusion, and only wished her a most kindly good-night ; and, at breakfast the next morning he mystified her still more by addressing himself to her friend, and begging Liliás to assist her in her difficult duties of cicerone, for the sun was shining, and there was a pleasant warmth in the atmo-

sphere, and a walk would be delightful; and he quite longed to see the outside of the Black Bull again, and the moon-shaped face of Mr. Atkinson.

Lilias seemed reluctant to accede to this polite request.

‘I am sure Marjory can show you everything,’ she returned. ‘Don’t you know the old adage, Mr. Frere, “Two are company and three are none”?’

‘That is too bad,’ interrupted Marjory eagerly, ‘when I have made a third at least a dozen times with you and Mr. Wentworth,’ at which Lilias blushed and looked wicked, and Marjory grew suddenly hot, as though she had made an awkward speech, and yet was hardly aware of what she had said, only she felt angry with herself, and Mr. Frere looked at them both with calmly amused eyes.

‘Nothing pleases me more than to controvert popular sayings. Besides, I can cap that proverb with another: “The more the merrier.” I am sure, Miss Carr, that your presence will greatly add to our merriment.’

‘I meant to have driven you out this afternoon,’ she replied, a little vexed at his perti-

nacity, for Liliās always knew when she was wanted, ‘but you and Marjory must have so much home news to discuss that I know I shall be in the way.’

‘But Marjory and I do not know it, do we?’ with a friendly glance at Marjory. ‘This is not my last day at Mavisbank, and home news has already been retailed. I am in a sociable mood this morning, and one auditor will not satisfy me;’ and after that Liliās was compelled to yield.

Marjory looked up in his face a little timidly. Had she hurt him last night? she thought. Had her reluctance to take a solitary walk with him been so plainly visible. But no, there was no resentment in the kind look that met hers.

‘Go and get ready, Marjory Doo,’ he said to her, and he put his hand gently on her arm. There was a nervous excitability about the girl this morning that needed to be soothed. He must make her more at ease with herself and him, he thought, before he dared to probe the secret wound ever so lightly.

Liliās thoroughly enjoyed her walk, and came home in the highest spirits; and even Marjory looked more like her cheerful self. Mr. Frere

had been charming, Liliás told Barry. He had talked to them and made them laugh with his humorous anecdotes. He would see everything: they had been to the castle and the Black Bull, and into the church. And they had called at the Vicarage and seen Katie; and Margaret was there, and Mr. Frere had had a long talk with her, and afterwards with the Vicar; and no wonder they were late for luncheon, when Mr. Frere would see all the children, and ask the name and age of every one. And during luncheon he was just as cheerful, and he and Liliás had more than one argument. He was quite willing to be driven over to Redlands, he told her, if he might remain silent and criticize her driving; but he would have the back seat, and Marjory must be in front. And what did they want with a groom, when he was willing to open any number of gates just to show his activity? and of course he gained his point.

Liliás was the first to join him as he stood at the open hall-door waiting for the girls. He regarded her rather quizzically as she came up smiling and drawing on her gauntlet gloves.

‘You do not look much of a Jehu,’ he said quietly.

Lilias blushed and looked a little guilty.

She was dressed charmingly in a dark blue velvet gown that fitted her to perfection, and her fair hair looked bright as gold under her close little velvet hat. Mr. Frere was quite aware that the gown had been made in Paris as soon as he saw it. Lilias, who generally dressed very quietly, though in perfect taste, was evidently bent on appearing to the best advantage. Her vanity was so innocent and transparent that he could not refrain from a half smile.

‘The rain has laid the dust, and I shall be well covered up,’ she said hurriedly. ‘You think me extravagant, Mr. Frere. Oh, I can read your thought—I am very quick at that. But Mrs. Wentworth will be so pleased to see this. It is her favourite gown, and one must please other people sometimes,’ finished Lilias, a little lamely.

‘It is my favourite dress, too,’ returned Mrs. Carr gently. ‘You never look so well in anything else, darling.’ There was a gleam of amusement in her eyes, too, as though she knew some one else had praised the velvet gown; but the little by-play was lost upon Mr. Frere, for there was Marjory coming across the hall in her

brown dress; and how could Liliás, charming and piquante as she was, compare with this girl, who carried her head so proudly, and yet walked with such a careless grace? Mrs. Carr caught his admiring glance. 'She is very handsome; she grows handsomer, I think,' she whispered. 'But it is her carriage that astonishes me so; few girls walk so well.'

'I have never seen anyone walk like Marjory,' he returned, 'unless it is yourself, Mrs. Carr. Marjory's carriage resembles yours. I was struck by that last night.'

'How strange!' she answered, smiling; and the little compliment pleased her, for a beautiful woman must always be pleased with admiration, though no one was really more free from vanity. Marjory looked at them both rather gravely as she passed. It was a good thing Mr. Frere's speech did not reach her, or her composure would have been ruffled.

In another moment Liliás's voice was heard chiding him for his delay, and he had taken his place behind them with many apologies.

But he was not silent—far from it. On the contrary, he had so much to say that Ruby was almost left to her own devices, and the

drive was quite as pleasant as the morning walk.

The young squire was not at the bridge this time; neither was he waiting at the door to receive them. It was quite half an hour before he made his appearance in his mother's drawing-room. Liliás was presiding at the little teatable, while Mr. Frere talked to Mrs. Wentworth, when he came in, looking heated and tired, having ridden in haste from St. Theobald's.

But the sight of Liliás in her velvet gown, pouring out his tea, evidently drove away all fatigue. A glow of pleasure came to his face as he sat down beside her, and said a few words to her in a low voice. Indeed, he did not leave her side during the remainder of the visit. They went out into the garden presently, for Mr. Wentworth wanted to show Liliás some new flower-beds; and as they walked down the terrace Marjory found herself alone with Mr. Frere.

‘We will follow them a little slowly,’ he said, with a light restraining touch on her arm. ‘One sees what all that means so clearly. Let that poor fellow have her to himself for a moment.’



CHAPTER XVI.

‘ I SAY, POOR WENTWORTH !’

MARJORY was a little amused by this remark.

‘ You have not found that out for yourself,’ she said, with a touch of malice. ‘ Of course you have read my letters to Anne, which were strictly private, and were not meant for your eyes ; and so you have found out all my little secrets ?’

‘ No, not quite all,’ he answered lightly ; and Marjory winced perceptibly, for she was certain there was a slight emphasis on the last word ; ‘ but I have found out one thing—that this Mr. Wentworth is a capital fellow, one of the right sort for making a woman happy ; and I hope your friend will soon see things in the proper light.’

'I hope so too ; but I am half afraid of Liliás.'

'That is because you have no experience, my dear,' he answered. 'Now, if you were to ask me, I should say there are certain signs of an impending crisis. Straws show which way the wind blows : so when a young lady takes the trouble to put on a becoming velvet gown, which is not at all suited to your country roads, it is not to please you or me, or even that dignified châtelaine we have just left. Mark my words, Marjory ! I am an acute observer : I saw a pleased gleam in that young man's eye when he saw that gown. Miss Carr is not quite so innocent as you think.'

'Liliás is no coquette !' answered Marjory indignantly.

'My dear child, every woman is a conscious or unconscious coquette. They begin young, Marjory : a baby will point out its blue shoes and sash to any intelligent old gentleman. You never had a new frock yourself without showing it to me promptly.'

'You do not call yourself an old gentleman, I hope,' with a quick scorn in her voice.

'No, not old ; but I might be younger,'

with a half-sigh; 'but I am ready to take a large amount of interest in your charming friend. If I knew Mr. Wentworth better—if I were in a position to speak—I should say to him, "My good fellow, you are a little too patient and long-suffering. Women are kittle cattle—they want a strong hand over them. Let her know what you mean pretty plainly, and bid her make up her mind one way or the other." Depend upon it, Marjory, she likes him too well to give him up.'

'I think so myself; but Liliás is not like other girls. She seems so afraid of losing her liberty; her home life is so precious to her, that she dreads giving it up. Mrs. Carr is the rival that Mr. Wentworth has to fear.'

'Oh, that is nonsense!' he answered quickly. 'A girl's mother would never hinder her marrying; such different affections could not clash. It is just a girl's whim—nothing but self-will, and a desire to test her power over her lover.'

'You are quite wrong,' persisted 'Marjory, speaking with her old animation; 'I have been angry myself with Liliás, but I know she is not like that. Oh, you may take my word for it, girls understand each other, and Liliás is as

transparent as crystal. She is not so happy as she makes out; she is fighting against herself and him. She wants impossible things — to have her home life and him too; she cannot make up her mind to exchange Mavisbank for Redlands.'

'Then he must show her by his behaviour that he will expect a decided answer, one way or another; that will cure her of vacillation. He is a good-tempered fellow, one can see that; but he must contrive to get up a scene and frighten her. Oh, your remarks were very true, Marjory; they made me smile when I read them. But I said to myself, "This Wentworth must have a poor spirit, if he could not bring this wilful young lady to reason, when it is evident that she likes him all the time."'

Marjory was silent; but she looked at the two figures before her with a half-curious, half-tender gaze. Mr. Wentworth was a noble lover, she thought—so patient and gentle: any girl might be proud of such constancy. 'Loyal je serais durant ma vie' was indeed his motto. Would anyone ever care for her in that way? A fleeting sigh escaped her as she turned to Mr. Frere. He had been watching her; but now he

resumed his cheerful talk. They had slid, unconsciously on her part, into their old ways; there was no painful embarrassment in her manner now.

'Well,' he said brightly, 'I am much taken with your new friend, Dr. Margaret Ainslie. I was very much pleased with her this morning. She is more feminine than I thought; she keeps her learning in the background. You have shown very good taste, Marjory, in this new friendship of yours.'

Marjory coloured up with gratification. She was never quite happy unless this friend of hers agreed with her.

'Oh,' she remarked, in a pleased voice, 'you will see her again this evening. Margaret dines at Mavisbank to-night.'

'I am glad to hear it,' he returned heartily. 'If I had not already lost my heart to Mrs. Carr and this charming Lilius, I could have found a corner for Miss Ainslie. I could have dispensed with the spectacles, perhaps; but then we cannot expect perfection in this world. She has a beautiful mouth—have you noticed that?—and her smile is just what a smile ought to be.'

‘ I have begun to think her very nice-looking ; but, Mr. Frere, you must give me your opinion of Miss Stallard.’

He made a little grimace.

‘ She is too sleek and soft for my taste ; she treads as gingerly as a cat on broken glass. One might as well pronounce an opinion on a mummy.’

‘ What do you mean by that ?’ she asked, laughing.

‘ It is very plain,’ he answered seriously ; ‘ we cannot penetrate through all these wrappings to get at the real article. The cat’s fur does not cling to the creature more closely than Miss Stallard’s pretty mannerisms cling to her. These soft creatures have concealed claws sometimes : one of these days Miss Stallard may show hers.’

Marjory had no time to express her approval of this sentiment, which certainly coincided with her own ; for at that moment Mr. Wentworth and Liliás joined them.

‘ Mr. Frere,’ she asked, a little eagerly, ‘ do you drive ? Do you think you could drive Ruby ?’

‘ Well,’ he returned, looking benignantly at her bright face, ‘ I believe I can drive as well

as most ordinary folk who have little practice. Whose neck do you wish to place in jeopardy?—your own or Marjory's?

'It is just this,' she replied quickly: 'Hurrell wants to come back with us to dinner, and we must not make the phaeton too heavy for Ruby; she gets ill-tempered at that. So I thought if you would kindly drive Marjory, Hurrell would take me in his dog-cart, and then poor Ruby will be eased.'

'An excellent idea! What do you say, Marjory?'

What could she say, with Mr. Wentworth's eyes fixed on her so anxiously, except to agree that it was a very good idea indeed? Nevertheless, Mr. Frere was quite conscious that her face had clouded a little. While Mr. Wentworth hurried off to the stables, she stood by silently while Liliás chatted with Mr. Frere. Liliás had so many orders to give him about Ruby. If she shied a little, that was only her playfulness, and he must take no notice of that; and she always liked going home so much that perhaps her pace would astonish him; and he must lead the way, for Ruby had a jealous temper, and would not follow another equipage with any degree of

meekness. There was no end to her directions.

‘I hope you will remember all this, Marjory,’ he said, in a resigned voice. ‘I shall never get you safely to St. Kilda’s, I am afraid ;’ but all the same, Marjory knew she could trust him. He had driven her and Anne before, and she remembered how pleasant those drives had been, and how happily they had come home in the summer twilight, with the stars just peeping through the dusky blue above their heads, and the smell of the gorse in the air, and the dark fir woods looking black in the faint light.

She need not have troubled herself so much about that solitary drive with him. Mr. Frere talked a good deal, but it was all on general subjects. He had just finished an article for the *Quarterly*, and he wanted to tell Marjory about it. And he had a great deal to say about Redlands and Mrs. Wentworth, and what a distinguished-looking woman she was, but far inferior, in his opinion, to Mrs. Carr. Marjory soon forgot her fears, and listened to him as happily as ever.

She expressed a little surprise, when they reached Mavisbank, that they did not hear the

wheels of the dog-cart coming up the hill. 'Mr. Wentworth's mare can go faster than Ruby,' she said, in a perplexed tone.

'I dare say her speed depends on her master's will,' was the significant answer; and then Fleming opened the door, and they went into the hall, with its pleasant firelight shining as usual on Mrs. Carr's velvet gown as she sat in her favourite chair talking to Miss Ainslie.

'Where is Lil?' asked Barry, rousing up from his book as Marjory went up to Margaret. She was looking very nice this evening, Marjory thought. She wore black silk, with a good deal of Spanish lace; and surely it was not Margaret who had fastened in that knot of scarlet geranium and maiden-hair, which gave her just the colour she needed.

'My dear, what have you done with Liliass?' chimed in Mrs. Carr.

'She will be here directly. Mr. Wentworth is driving her in his dog-cart. They must have loitered on their way, for we did not even hear the wheels. Mr. Wentworth wanted to dine here this evening, and there was no room for us all in the phaeton.'

Mrs. Carr seemed perfectly satisfied with this

arrangement, but it struck Marjory that Miss Ainslie looked a little nervous and perturbed. It might have been her fancy, for the next moment she was speaking in her ordinary manner. Surely Margaret was not such a recluse that the presence of an old friend should disturb her serenity ; but what did that sudden flush on her face mean ?

‘ Shall I come up with you ? ’ she said in a low voice, as Marjory would have passed her ; and as Marjory willingly acceded to this, the girls went upstairs together.

Marjory was more than half dressed when she heard Liliás’s light footsteps passing her room, and opened her door, with a laughing word at her delay.

‘ I am very late—do not keep me ! ’ replied Liliás hurriedly, turning her face away as the light flashed across the passage ; but not before Marjory had seen that her eyes were wet, and that there were tears running down her face.

‘ Oh, Liliás ! ’ she pleaded, ‘ do stay a moment, and let me speak to you.’

But Liliás shook her head and went into her own room ; and Marjory, surprised and pained, went back to Margaret.

She thought that Mrs. Carr looked a little anxious when they went downstairs; she was sitting gazing into the fire and taking no notice of her guest, who with his usual tact was talking to Barry. Mr. Wentworth was standing moodily by the mantelpiece; he came forward and shook hands with Margaret, and said a few words to her very gravely. But Marjory was shocked to see how pale and harassed he looked; all the light and animation seemed to have died out of his face; he looked heavy and sombre—quite different to the bright young squire who had gone off whistling merrily to order his dog-cart. There was plainly something very much amiss, and it threw a gloom over the little circle.

'Lilias is so late that I think we had better begin dinner,' observed Mrs. Carr presently.

And then they all seated themselves round the cheerful table, with its pink-shaded candles and flowers; and what must Mr. Frere do but start one of his long harangues on the government of India, which required nothing but monosyllabic replies from the rest of the party.

He had fairly launched into his subject, and the soup and fish had been removed when Lilias

glided into the room—still in her blue velvet gown, and only her fair hair smoothed a little, as though she had forgotten to change her dress. A place had been left for her between Mr. Frere and Marjory, for Mr. Wentworth had seated himself by Margaret. Marjory stole a quick glance at her. Lilius was pale—very pale, she thought—and her eyelids were red, as though she had been weeping. It was impossible not to notice that the food was sent away untasted on her plate. But if Mr. Wentworth saw all this, it did not move him from his stern apathy. He began talking to Margaret, quite ignoring the Eastern Question. He was asking her about some people to whom he wished to send relief; and did she think Canada would be a good opening for the eldest son, who was a likely fellow and understood farming? And all the time he talked, he kept his eyes fixed moodily on his plate.

Mr. Frere was doing his part gallantly. He must have quoted whole pages from his article in the *Quarterly Review* before Marjory had the presence of mind to come to his relief. Mrs. Carr was too anxious to join in their talk; but Barry tried to argue the matter a little from his

couch, but his voice was so weak that Mr. Frere silenced him promptly.

Miss Ainslie was not enjoying her *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Wentworth. Every now and then she coloured painfully, and gave him a timid glance, as though begging him to desist from his efforts to entertain her; but it was evidently his intention to speak to no one else, and he plodded through a long description of some model farm he had lately visited. Margaret, who was rather ignorant on such subjects, had nothing to say in return; so she merely bent her grand head and listened.

It was quite a relief when their hostess gave the signal to the ladies to rise. Mrs. Carr waited at the door for Lilius; and as soon as they were outside, she put her arm round the girl, and drew her towards the staircase.

'You have tired yourself out—you have one of your headaches,' she said aloud, for the benefit of the gentlemen within.

'Shall I wish you good-evening, Mrs. Carr?' observed Mr. Wentworth, approaching them with a gloomy expression. 'My dog-cart will be round directly; and, as Lilius has a headache——' not looking at her, however.

‘ Oh yes, I have a headache,’ said the poor girl, stretching out a cold hand to him ; but he did not seem to see it—only turned away with an inclusive good-night to the party.

‘ Oh, mother !’ Marjory heard her say, in quite a heart-broken tone. Margaret must have heard it too.

‘ Come, darling, come ! there is a fire in my room,’ returned Mrs. Carr tenderly.

A sort of dull anguish smote Marjory as she looked after them in the dim light. They were walking slowly upstairs hand in hand, and Liliás’s hair brushed Mrs. Carr’s shoulder.

‘ Why do you look like that ? Is there anything dreadful the matter ?’ asked Margaret, in an alarmed voice ; and her lips looked very pale.

‘ Oh ! it is only a lovers’ quarrel ?’ returned Marjory, with a forced unnatural laugh. ‘ Those two have fallen out. I dare say they will make it up to-morrow. How cold it is !—and yet it is May ; we are both shivering. Let us go back to Cosy Nook ; Mr. Frere will soon join us.’

Marjory was wrong. Mr. Frere did not join them for another hour. Fleming brought them some coffee, and told Marjory that Barry was tired and had gone to his room, and the two

gentlemen were smoking in the conservatory. It was quite late before the wheels of the dog-cart sounded under the window, and they could hear Mr. Wentworth's voice bidding Mr. Frere good-night. Margaret had put on her cloak, for her servant was waiting for her. She only lingered until Mr. Wentworth had driven off, and then she said good-bye to Marjory.

Marjory stood thoughtfully leaning against the high carved mantelpiece. She had no idea what a picture she made in Mr. Frere's eyes, as he closed the door behind him. For months afterwards the recollection of that evening crossed him in summer twilights or on moonlight nights. The warm gleams of light thrown over the old hall, with the solitary girlish figure in the white gown, standing with bent head and tightly clasped hands; the deep, unspoken sadness of the eyes as she raised them to his face—as pathetic as the eyes of a lost child who has strayed back to find its home in ruins; the beautiful little head, so heavily weighted with its dark hair—not carried in its old, proud fashion, but drooping forward a little.

Marjory had lost herself in her weary musings. She had no conception of the rush of tenderness

that filled her friend's heart as he watched ; but in another moment he had stepped up to her, and had laid his hand upon her shoulder.

'You are in one of your old brown studies,' he said gently. 'Do you remember how I caught you dreaming one day with an east wind blowing round you ? It is time, is it not, for you to be dreaming on your pillow ?'

'Is it so late ?' she answered, starting a little. 'Margaret has only just gone. What a strange evening it has been ! Poor Mr. Wentworth looks dreadfully unhappy ! I hope'—glancing at him a little timidly, for his intent look rather troubled her—'that you have contrived to comfort him.'

'The comfort does not lie in my hands, unfortunately,' he returned gravely. 'He is very much broken down, poor fellow ; and, though I was a stranger, he gave me his confidence. It is droll, is it not, Marjory, for a dry old fellow like me to be the recipient of a lover's confidence ?'

'Oh no !' she answered quickly ; 'you are always so good to people in trouble. I knew he would tell you all about it, and how kindly and patiently you would listen. I am sure you would give him the best advice.'

'The question is whether he will take it. Your friend Lilius has been very naughty—very naughty indeed, Marjory; and it is my opinion that he ought to punish her.'

'He will never do that,' she replied confidently.

'That remains to be proved. If he take my advice, he will free himself from her thralldom and assert himself. There will be no hope for either of them unless he becomes her master. Naughty children, who do not know their own minds, must taste of the rod of correction. If he take my advice, well and good; but in this crazy world most men prefer setting up their own finger-posts.'

'Poor Lilius!' sighed Marjory.

'Come, that is too bad—I will not have you side with the offender. I say, poor Wentworth! to be tormented by that little witch. Do you know, Marjory, I am half sorry to see the wealth of love that is lavished on that little pale-faced girl.'

'What do you mean?' she asked, rather frightened at his tone.

'I think,' he returned slowly, 'that it is a great pity so many hearts are set on her. She

is very delicate, Marjory. I do not believe her mother or lover sees it. She is so bright that she deceives them ; but I have noticed——’ but here he stopped.

‘Tell me what you were going to say!’ she implored anxiously. ‘I know she is delicate. She cannot walk up-hill ; and she once told me that she was sure her heart was weak, for, when anything excited her, she had palpitations ; but she begged me not to mention this to Mrs. Carr.’

‘Just so!’ he returned, in a significant voice. ‘She is so active and full of spirit, that no wonder they are deceived. I tried to hint something of this to Wentworth. “Miss Carr is not strong. I think she has more spirit than strength.” That was what I said to him, Marjory. Do you know, he contradicted me. He said : “Oh, you think that, because she has a pale complexion ; but she is never ill. Oh no ; Liliias is never ill. A headache now and then, what does that signify ?” But, Marjory, I could tell at one glance that she does not inherit her mother’s superb constitution.’

Marjory was silent. A cold fear was creeping over her. What if Liliias, cherished and beloved as she was, had inherited her mother’s feeble

organization? She remembered Mrs. Chard's attacks, and a shiver crossed her.

'You are cold, my dear,' observed Mr. Frere, taking her hand. 'I have filled your mind with gloomy fancies, instead of bidding you good-night. You must go now, Marjory, for you look quite pale and tired. To-morrow'—and here there was a singular inflection in his tone—'you and I will go out together, and we will not have Miss Carr. And you shall take me to the seat in the wood, and we will have one of our old talks, for there must be nothing hidden between you and me, my darling.'

END OF VOL. II.



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